

## I Asked for a Monster and You Gave Me a Fairytale

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# I Asked for a Monster and You Gave Me a Fairytale

by Anonymous

## Summary

Tommy had suffered on and off throughout his life from hanahaki, which sort of happens to someone who trusts too much and always gets their hopes crushed. He just wants someone to actually care about him, but he knows he's not going to get that, especially not with Dream and not with how the disease has been getting worse.

Dying and defeated, Tommy's only solace comes in the form of weird eldritch singing emanating from the forest outside his window. He knows that whatever it is will likely be a cannibalistic cryptid from his worst nightmares, but somehow he can't find it in himself to care. Any death will be better than suffocating alone.

Or

Tommy is on a quest to get killed by unknown monsters instead of the ones he does know. This is somehow more difficult than it should be.

## Notes

*"Hanahaki Disease is a fictional disease where the victim of unrequited or one-sided love begins to vomit or cough up the petals and flowers of a flowering plant growing in their lungs, which will eventually grow large enough to render breathing impossible if left untreated."*

Obviously, this fic involves platonic love and not romantic. The disease has also been altered to better suit the story, but the basic principle is still the same. Because of the disease, there will be a lot of graphic depictions of coughing up flower petals.

Additionally, this story has horror elements (although we'll see if I have any actual skill in writing horror), and some warnings might get missed but I'll try my best. 3/4 of the SBI are also murderous cryptids and as such do fucked up shit on regular occasion. Just a heads up.

Warnings for this chapter:

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Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, referenced child abuse, manipulation, and neglect

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [Do Mi Ti \(Why Not Me?\)](#) by [NoxiousStrawberries](#)

# Fill My Head with Empty Thoughts

Tommy had started leaving his window open the last four nights.

Normally, he never bothered with the window. It was always shut and locked, except when the house was being cleaned, and Dream didn't like him getting anywhere near it otherwise. His reasoning was that he wanted to make sure Tommy was safe. After being his adopted kid for two years, Tommy knew better now.

Hence why Tommy always waited for Dream to fall asleep first before he opened the window anyway.

The first incident had happened when it was past midnight. Tommy should have been asleep himself, but the coughing fits had been getting worse, and sleep came in fleeting bursts at best. Across the room, the curtains had been left slightly open, letting in a beam of moonlight no wider than the palm of a hand. He'd been hacking up flower petals again, and when the fit subsided he'd slumped forward, half out of it, staring at the flecks of blood and purple petals staining his sheets, and the cut of moonlight across it. Then a shadow passed.

Tommy's head had jerked over to look at the window, expecting maybe an owl or something. Instead, he caught a glimpse of a face. Then he blinked and it was gone, the afterimage of two staring eyes burned into his mind.

Now, Tommy was far from naïve. He knew the house was next to a forest, and sometimes eldritch creatures craving human flesh tended to make their homes in forests, eating from a town before eventually moving on to another, and as such opening the window in the middle of the night was possibly the worst thing to do after seeing a face pass by outside the glass.

He opened the window.

Not before peering through the curtains for any sign of something, however. When he couldn't spot any movement in the dark, or any eyes or fangs, his fingers found the latch. The panes of glass swung open, a cool night breeze wafted in, and Tommy blinked.

He hadn't been outside the house in months now. He barely even passed by open windows anymore, so the jolt of fresh air had been startling. More than that, though, had been the *singing*.

It was indiscernible from the rustle of leaves when it began. A faint rise and fall that grew louder without purpose, and once Tommy noticed it, it was impossible not to notice it. Something in his head beyond his own senses told him its epicenter was in the forest, and Tommy's fingers twitched against the window sill with the urge to climb out and down and go find it. He didn't, first and foremost because that was stupid. Secondly because his lungs were full of fucking flowers and he'd fallen out of a second floor window before and was not exactly excited to repeat the experience. But the sentiment was still there. The idea was still there. He couldn't help but be addicted to it.

He kept the window open for a few hours that first night. Tried to pretend that it was only out of boredom, the voice being the most interesting thing to have happened in months. Truthfully, he knew it was because the singing, with all its haunting thrall, eased his mind with promises of a journey into the forest, and even if that would never happen, it was nice for the daydream to feel so real. It eased the aching in his chest, made the coughing fits easier to endure.

He closed the window long before morning, paranoid about Dream finding out. The weird thing was that for once, Dream never did.

So he kept doing it.

The first instance had been accidental. The following nights, including tonight, were entirely intentional.

When Tommy heard Dream retire that fourth night, the echo of his bedroom door closing, Tommy started counting out an hour in his head, still curled up in his own bed with a book then forgotten on his lap. Each wheezing breath that scraped its way into his lungs and left was a second, and when he counted enough, he carefully pulled back the layers of blankets, tried to resist the urge to shiver or cough, and limped his way over to the window to crack it open.

Tommy's fingers were more shaky now than they had been a few months ago, and even something like pulling the latch to unlock the window seemed to sap his strength and leave him trembling. Once he had it open, he sagged against the wall and onto the floor, tall enough to peer out over the sill and into the woods.

Dream's house was right on the border of the forest that surrounded the town, their neighbours distant and not really present. Hence Tommy didn't get a chance to meet a lot of people in the town since getting adopted, seeing as he was homeschooled. He used to have a friend though, a kid who'd go to the same park as him. But, well, he hadn't spoken to Tubbo since the incident that happened months ago, and even before then their friendship had been shaky and fractured, pulling apart.

Tommy found himself grimacing, because just the thought of Tubbo, of being left alone, clogged his lungs and seemed to crawl into his throat, and Tommy hunched in on himself as a coughing fit took over.

The force of it was enough to scrap his throat and leave him breathless, more tired than he'd been a second ago, and entire minutes went by before the fit fully subsided. Tommy grimaced, wiped spit from his mouth, and stared near unseeing at the speckles of blood and purple petals that were now plastered to his floor. They were from an allium flower. He'd looked into it, or rather, some social worker had when he was seven and the fits had first started, as a way to bring him some sort of comfort through knowledge. Maybe it had, at the time.

Tommy had been suffering through bouts of hanaki disease for almost a decade now. The disease had come and gone with regularity, sometimes for just a few weeks, sometimes

lasting a year or two, usually ebbing and flowing in tune with new foster families and subsequent rejections.

It wasn't the most well researched condition, since it had a supernatural origin and was closer to a curse in nature, but it was studied to be brought on in some people during extensive periods of rejection or loneliness, and some treatments had been developed for it. If managed, a person could live with it for a long time. If not, well, sometimes it could be fatal or require hospitalization.

Tommy figured he was long past the point of hospitalization.

Even a year ago it hadn't been bad at all, no more detrimental than if he'd had slight asthma. Then his friendship with Tubbo had started falling apart, and it had only gone downhill from there. After the incident Dream eventually banned him from leaving the house altogether on claims of keeping him safe, and as of a month ago, had forced him to be bedridden. Tommy had the freedom to walk to the bathroom on the same floor and that was it. His world had been narrowed down to the entirety of his bedroom in the upstairs of the house and whatever books Dream sometimes brought him.

Shockingly, the disease only got worse, but Tommy was long past the point of caring now. He knew that in order to get better, someone had to actually care about him, and unfortunately there wasn't anyone in his life who did anymore. Maybe Dream, in some weird twisted way, but thoughts of Dream made Tommy's stomach twist uncomfortably and his right leg twinge with phantom pain and the urge to cough rise up into his throat.

Hence, the window.

Tommy let the wall take more of his weight as exhaustion from hacking half a lung out took over. He wasn't worried about waking Dream, considering that he always had regular coughing fits throughout the night, sometimes jolting awake to them from a dead sleep unable to breath, and Dream had long since stopped checking in on him.

Still he kept an idle eye on the door when he wasn't staring at the forest, and finally, after long minutes of waiting, another sound was heard beneath the brushing of leaves in the wind:

Singing.

Tommy closed his eyes when it reached him, breathing out shakily and ignoring how much it hurt to do so. His mouth tasted like blood so often that he wasn't sure what saliva was supposed to taste like anymore.

This though. This was something that wasn't the coughing fits or the pain in his leg or the claustrophobic room. This was a sweet melody sung by a lulling voice that Tommy couldn't pick apart. He couldn't say if it was deep or high pitched or if it had a gender. It was a voice without description, singing something sweeter than Tommy could have ever heard if he'd listened to every song in existence.

It swept into every crevice of his mind, pulling at him, gently, urging him with whispers of ideas that he should climb out the window or go downstairs out the back door and just...

walk into the woods. If he did that, it said, then he'd be able to hear it all the more clearly.

Tommy never followed the instructions, not necessarily for a lack of wanting to. Unfortunately, Dream had confiscated his crutches months ago, and also Tommy wasn't a complete idiot.

He knew that something supernatural was making that music. That it was more than likely a person or two had wandered from the town into the woods by now, seeing as it had already been at least four nights since something had moved into the forest. People would go missing and would not be found.

Tommy knew that logically he should have told Dream about the singing and the face on that first night. It was a danger to everyone in the town. Sometimes horrid, inhuman things liked to move in near a city or town, in deep forests or empty fields or dark sewers, and people would start to go missing as the creature would start to feed. Eventually hunters would be hired, and whatever lurked would be killed or driven away, and the town would be safe again. Obviously no one besides Tommy had noticed the new visitor yet, but it would be noticed soon.

Tommy should report this, seeing as people could die if he didn't.

He didn't report it.

He just kept his eyes closed and listened and let the song wash away the pain and aching of his body, and found himself wishing that whatever it was would sing a little louder, so that Tommy would have the strength to walk into that forest and cease to exist.

The singing, being a stubborn asshole, remained at the edge of his hearing, no more real than a whisper on the breeze.

Prick.

# The Hardest Things to Perceive are Those in Motion

## Chapter Summary

There is someone in the backyard.

## Chapter Notes

Welcome back. Classes are starting again so at some point my motivation and energy levels will drop like a rock, but until that happens I plan to do frequent updates since I have several more chapters finished. That said, I posted two fics right after each other, and apparently the people have decided that this one is their favorite. Good luck.

Chapter warnings:

.  
Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, referenced child abuse, manipulation, body horror

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Like most good things in Tommy's life, it didn't last.

He might not have been the one to report the singing, but someone else did. The next morning he could hear knocking on the front door downstairs and Dream answering, and then muffled conversation. Sometime later, Dream entered Tommy's room without knocking and went to the window (closed and latched, all flower petals having been meticulously picked up and discarded out of sight) without preamble, checking it over with a careful eye.

"What's up?" Tommy asked, his voice rough and raspy as it always was. His bed and clothes were always sort of a mess, considering he had long lost the strength to try and stifle or cover his coughing, so specks of blood and flower petals decorated his person and room in locations he frequented.

"Something is in the forest," Dream answered idly, which was nice of him. He rarely ever tolerated questions, but it was obvious this was information he wanted Tommy to have. "Two people in town have already gone missing and hunters have been called, but they won't get here for a few days. When was the last time you opened this window?"



Tommy shrugged, and then quickly moved the book he'd been reading aside as a coughing fit rose up, and Dream waited for it to take its course and for Tommy to be able to speak again, although he really didn't want to. His throat felt raw and burning, but Tommy wiped the blood and petals from his lips with a grimace, and tried to get his breath back, careful not to breathe too deep as that would cause the flowers in his lungs to tickle his throat and make him cough all over again. "May- Maybe a few weeks. Or longer."

It wasn't really hard to lie anymore. That was probably one of the only perks of whatever sort of apathy had come over Tommy the last few months. His voice was always flat and raspy, and he was just tired. Too tired to be scared sometimes.

It wasn't like Dream could touch him much anymore. If he kicked Tommy in the stomach again, like he used to, or did anything else that would interrupt Tommy's breathing, there was a pretty good chance he might just not recover and suffocate altogether. And if there was one thing that Dream hated, it was hospital trips. He only took Tommy once, a few months ago, and nothing had really come of it. Dream had just confiscated the crutches half the time and tossed away the medication Tommy had been given for the pain and the hanahaki, and that had been the end of it.

Somehow, becoming fragile enough that a stiff wind could take him out had become Tommy's saving grace.

Dream hummed a bit to show he heard, then with a quick precise movement, jerked the curtains closed. "Keep your window shut and locked, and curtains in place so nothing sees you." Dream then pursed his lips, eyeing Tommy and then the window. "I don't like you being on the same side of the house as the woods. I hate to say it, but my study might be better for you to stay in until the hunters get here."

Tommy blinked at him, and that last bit of hope threatened to fall away. The study was on the other side of the house so he wouldn't be able to hear the singing anymore, and somehow Tommy couldn't comprehend that. It was literally the only good thing that had happened to him in months, and fuck, alright, maybe Tommy was sort of hoping to be killed by a supernatural monster, but it was either that or dying in a bed he wasn't allowed to leave from a disease that had been leeching off him his whole life with only Dream for company, so one could understand why Tommy was sort of hoping something with fangs and teeth would disappear him instead.

Then again, would Dream really move him back to the study? That room had been Tommy's original bedroom when he moved in, and its window overlooked the front of the house. The biggest difference between the two rooms was that his old bedroom had the porch roof right beneath it, so if someone wanted to, say, climb out, there was a solid way to do that. Moving Tommy's bedroom to its current location, with a clear drop out the window with no good handholds, was meant to discourage such behaviour. Not that Tommy would know anything about that, and Dream had been pretty clear that they'd never talk about that particular incident again.

"It's fine, Dream," Tommy said, hoping he could salvage this and stay in his current room to hear the singing, but also wondering if maybe he could manage to climb out the window of his old bedroom even in his condition and maybe wander into the forest. But the climb hadn't

gone well when his health wasn't complete shit, so he wasn't too optimistic now. It was probably better to just stick to the singing. "It's only a few more days."

Dream considered this for a moment, and the expression on his face was enough that Tommy knew he'd won. "You're probably right. This bedroom's been better for you anyway." It's harder to escape from.

"I like it," Tommy answered, pretending to have feelings. The gesture of sucking up to Dream was near second nature by this point, and Tommy was too deep in his apathy to really care about his pride at this point. He watched as Dream left, but not before his guardian leaned over to kiss his forehead, as if there was any genuine care in place. Tommy did his best not to react, and instead felt his stomach twist as the door clicked shut. Thankfully, there was no clicking of the lock, but Tommy knew that could change at the first sign Dream smelled trouble.

He tried to go back to reading his book and relax, ignoring how his hunger had started scratching at him, knowing that if Dream hadn't brought him anything to eat yet, then he wouldn't be getting anything soon. He wasn't allowed downstairs where the kitchen was, and Dream could be a hell of a forgetful person when he put his mind to it.

Not much changed during the rest of the day, and Tommy ended up spending his time in the usual fashion. Reading and coughing and catching random bits of sleep that never lasted long and only left him more exhausted.

There was just. Flower petals. Everywhere. They'd tickle his skin from where he'd lie on top of them, and the smell was always sickly sweet next to the scent of stale blood. Tommy would just grimace and ignore it, as always, just breathing a bit longer.

Dream did bring him lunch, and even supper, which meant he must be concerned about whatever was in the forest. More than once someone came over, and Tommy could hear the muffled noises of conversation taking place downstairs.

Sometimes he'd sort of wonder who it was, if it was the neighbours or Dream's friends (or maybe Tubbo, but the coughing fits made it hard to think about him). In the end it didn't matter. Tommy himself never got visitors, and it had been months now since he'd seen another face besides Dream's. Well, unless you counted the glimpse of something outside his window four days ago.

Eventually, night fell again, Dream checked on him one last time, and then retired to his own room. Tommy counted out the hour as he usually did in his head, time enough for Dream to fall asleep, and then he gathered as much strength as he could to hoist himself out of bed. He was stiff from sitting, and he half stumbled to the window, his right leg protesting in pain as usual and doing its best to be a general nuisance, because apparently being broken and then not set right and then broken again and set by an actual doctor was something worth being a bitch about and not healing right.

Tommy's hands shook a bit as he disregarded everything Dream had told him earlier without a hint of regret, and pulled back the curtains and unlocked the window, opening it to let in the night breeze and hopefully the singing.

Tommy could hear it almost immediately, and he sank to his knees in relief and also exhaustion. He went through his usual coughing fit, but it was a quick one, and as soon as it died down he was able to listen to the melody easier, and the tickle in his throat seemed to subside as if to listen too.

The singing was the usual sweet siren song, the lyrics unintelligible with how faint it was, but Tommy knew it was something about safety and home and *come-into-the-forest*.

Tommy's leg ached, and he ignored it, and he listened, eyes half closed while idly trained on the forest. That's how he saw it.

Movement at the edge of the yard. A shadow detaching itself from the treeline and across the open grass before it reached the backyard. Then it entered the overgrown garden, no more than a blob in the dark as it bent to unlatch the fence gate and allow it to swing open.

Context clues were enough to cause Tommy to perk up with interest, because holy fuck! This was definitely an eldritch-something that had taken up residence in the forest. Curiously, it wasn't the thing singing, since the melody was still faintly twisting in the background, which meant that more than one supernatural being had moved into the woods. Tommy counted this to be a good thing.

The person, it looked sort of like a man, maybe, took its time walking up the little stone path to approach the back door of the house. The closer it got, the more details could be made out. A long coat that furled around its ankles, a wide brimmed-hat with a veil hanging around but lifted up in the front. Another something trailing behind the figure's coat, emanating from its back. Wings, maybe, if wings were twisted and mangled and made of mesh and wire and decaying, unidentifiable shapes in the dark.

Then Tommy realized, slightly giddy now, that the motion-sensitive porch light had not automatically turned on at any point, despite the fact its range covered the entire yard and this thing was very clearly moving through the yard. Even from the second floor window, Tommy could make out the *click click* sound of its shoes on the stones, the night having fallen silent with no breeze and no crickets without Tommy's notice.

Even the singing had ceased, leaving Tommy's brain to fill the absence of noise with a sort of static, to harmonize with the *click click*.

The stranger reached the backdoor, having kept an eerily smooth and leisurely pace as if it had been floating. Its face was obscured by the shadows of its hat, even unveiled, and a hand pulled out of the pocket of its coat to raise up and carefully deliver three sharp raps to the back door, pausing just long enough between each one for it to be a slow, purposeful, and wholly unnatural pattern.

Tommy flinched despite himself as he heard the knocking echo behind through the silent house and reach his bedroom door, and somehow, a feeling of fear that he hadn't felt the last four days finally itched at him. He couldn't breathe for a moment, skin permeated with goosebumps. A sort of dreaded horror that arose with no source and pulled at his mind. He realized, faintly, that this terror wasn't natural, his feelings not his own just like the singing

had tried to push ideas into his brain, only the creature on the porch step was a lot more successful. He couldn't look away from the figure that wanted to enter his house.

Worse was the fact that there was no indication that Dream knew what was going on. No rustling from his room or other footsteps in response to the knocking. For this moment, it was only Tommy and the thing below him.

Accordingly, there was no one to answer the door, although the stranger didn't seem to be bothered with waiting. It just stood there, hands in coat pockets, entirely still with no sound made except the *click click* as it tapped its shoe, and the weird buzzing static that Tommy's brain conjured to make things better in the face of the unease that permeated his skin.

Then.

It moved.

Just as slowly as it had drifted through the garden, the figure turned its head, tilted it up, and looked directly at Tommy as if it'd known he'd been watching the entire time.

A wave of '*oh fuck*' hit Tommy like a tidal wave, and he couldn't breathe he couldn't breathe his hands were white knuckled on the window sill-

Its face was still in shadow beneath the brim of its hat, so of course it was at that moment that for no discernable reason, the porchlight suddenly kicked on, and illuminated what Tommy could only in the moment realize was definitely not a human face and instead an impersonation of one made with exposed metal wire and mounds of flesh before Tommy finally jerked back from the window and sound rushed in and there was a pop and shattering of glass as everything was dark again and holy fuck he couldn't breathe-!

He doubled over coughing, and somehow in his panic managed to fumble with the window, heaving it closed and locking it and getting blood and petals everywhere in the process. Tears were in his eyes by the time the fit subsided, and shakily he managed to jerk the curtains closed. It didn't matter much. The porchlight had been broken, and his unadjusted eyes could only see darkness outside and in his room, and he had no idea where the fuck the- the thing was now.

The only real clue that Tommy had that it was over and the thing was gone, was that eventually his shivers subsided from where he was curled in a ball, and his breathing calmed, and the goosebumps faded. The terror fell away bit by bit, enough for Tommy to realize, with a burst of irritation, that he had meant to get killed by that thing. Unfortunately, its presence apparently kicked started Tommy's self-preservation instinct and desire to survive, so now Tommy was alone again. Plan failed. Fuck.

Still, he couldn't get that fucking- fucking face out of his brain, no matter how much he scrubbed at his eyes or tried to blink spots out of his vision. He couldn't even piece it together. Just flashes wire sewn through salvaged skin that his mind struggled to put together into something solid. No wonder the weirdo wore a veil. Fuck that guy.

At some point, Tommy found it in himself to get to his feet again, his eyes having adjusted to the dark. That meant he spent the next ten minutes carefully combing over his carpet and picking up flower petals, swiping at the blood stains until they sort of faded away, turning on his lamp to give the area a better look before he decided the evidence was gone.

How he made it back to his bed Tommy didn't know, but finally he allowed himself to collapse, exhausted and still shaking, traces of that fucking fear still itching under his skin even now and causing the shadows to dance in his room.

Fuck.

Fuck okay.

Getting killed by supernatural creatures maybe not be the best plan.

Fucking hell.

Tommy found that every time he closed his eyes flashes of the face filled his vision, so of course he had to lay awake staring at the ceiling instead. He decided, tired and delirious after coming off a full panic and then having to clean up the aftermath, that the man(?) was also a fucking prick. A prick with a decaying, inhuman face that was beyond human comprehension.

But a prick nonetheless.

## Chapter End Notes

Tommy: I would like to encounter one (1) murderous creature

Murderous creature: appears

Tommy: Actually fuck that

Plot kicks off next chapter. This is not a good thing. Good luck.

# Wilbur is a Bitch

## Chapter Summary

There is someone at the window.

## Chapter Notes

Mmmm... plot.

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, body horror, tryphobia, referenced child abuse, manipulation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Naturally, on the sixth night Tommy was back at his window.

He went about it with actual caution this time, pulling back the curtains just enough to peer out and into the dark yard. There was no movement besides the swaying of leaves in the wind. No dark figures, nothing in the garden nor on the porch. There was no sign of whatever man, as much of a man as it could have been, that had been here the night before.

Dream also hadn't shown any signs that he'd been aware of what happened last night. At least not the majority of it. He just brought Tommy breakfast, checked that his window was still secure, then fucked off to go talk with more people downstairs like always, forgetting to bring Tommy lunch or supper in the process. All the while never once did Dream mention that anyone or anything had knocked on the back door last night, just that the porch light had been broken, and that Tommy should continue to stay away from the window and tell Dream if he noticed anything weird. Tommy couldn't tell what was more unsettling: Dream's ignorance to the knocking or the acknowledgement of the shattered light.

More concerning was that Dream was still inspecting his window, and at this point any flower petal or bit of blood would tip him off. It made Tommy panic in a way that pushed at the apathy, a sort of indescribable worry in him that he would mess up, and knowing that he had to do everything in his power to just keep listening to the song, even though he knew there was the equivalent of an anglerfish at the other end, probably waiting to eat him or flay him or remove his kidneys or something.

Being skinned alive and hung out to dry and worn as a coat would still be better than suffocating, Tommy knew, and a part of him regretted closing the window last night. A part of him wondered if he would have had time to ease himself downstairs, and if he couldn't have let the veiled thing in and welcomed it. Even if he never wanted to see that not-human face again. Even if a horror with no source had gripped him tight enough to crush him.

With nothing to be seen outside, Tommy carefully finished drawing the curtains away from the window, pausing as another fit of coughing passed through him, leaving him dizzy and tired with petals plastered to his palm. Fucking alliums.

He hesitated to unlatch the actual window frames. He wanted to hear the song. He regretted not answering the door last night. Yet somehow those pesky self preservation instincts tried to kick in, urging him to listen to the residual terror that lingered whenever he closed his eyes and not open that fucking window.

Tommy jerked away as a stray petal tickled his throat, delayed from the previous fit, and took his time hacking it up, feeling the familiar scrap of the flesh in his throat and the tight feel of delicate roots threading through his lung tissue.

When he wiped away the tears gathered in the corners of his eyes, he froze. Something had changed in his peripheral vision where the window was.

Slowly, Tommy lowered his hand and looked up and over.

Someone- *Something* was outside his window, perched on the sill and smiling at him.

It was something more like a person at least, the details a bit murky in the dark although the light of the near full moon helped. Someone dressed in a ragged brown coat with cuts on its face and hands, a honeycomb of holes spattering the palm pushed against the glass. Curled hair laced with white and brown, and glasses too, for some fucking reason. Why a supernatural creature wouldn't have perfect vision, Tommy had no idea. He stared at the thing, and the thing stared back at him with an easy grin that Tommy found was made up of far more sharp teeth than was comforting. It gave a soft tap to the window with a too-many jointed finger. Alright then.

There was a mild fear, unnatural and with no source, trying to pierce his mind, but it wasn't as strong as the terror the other being from the night before had caused, so Tommy brushed it aside.

“Ow do,” Tommy said, because he was civil.

The thing smiled at him, almost sad with a pout, and gestured for him to open the window. Tommy would like to clarify here once more that he was not an idiot and thought the thing had even the slightest of good intentions. But. Well. He was trying to get murdered by a supernatural creature, so why the fuck not let it in.

For once his fingers barely shook as he undid the latch and let the window panes swing open, and all at once the breeze swept in alongside the figure. Boots stamped with mud landed on Tommy's floor, although the creature remained seated on the sill. It was surprisingly human,

though with a number of things off here and there. The mud and black substance that stained its boots, clothes, hands, and face. The mangled lumps of its ears. The cuts and spiral holes in its skin. Sharp teeth and hooked fingers with extra joints.

Despite the hundred other off putting things, Tommy would say that the feature that unsettled him the most were the eyes.

There was nothing wrong with them and that was the problem. They were a warm brown, soft and welcoming. But they were too human, somehow. It gave Tommy the creeps.

Then of course it blinked, and it had spiraling holes in its eyelids as well, which gave a split second of a horrific image before they retracted and those friendly, human eyes were looking at him again.

In the end though, Tommy just stared at the intruder, overall unimpressed.

The creature simply smiled a bit wider, the lines of its mouth not where they should be. “Hello-“ it crooned, its voice sweet and penetrating, seeping with warmth and honey that saturated Tommy’s mind, causing him to lean forward and listen and- oh god fucking dammit!

Tommy doubled over as the tickling and scraping of petals in his throat grew too intense, and great wracking coughs shook his thin frame, sending his head spinning and causing black spots to dance in his vision. Whatever spell that had been trying to wriggle into his mind was instantly broken, as suddenly there was only the feeling of petals in his throat and the coughing fit that followed. He ended up nearly collapsed on the floor, pressing his hands into the carpet as his body contorted, and a great mass of petals scraped up his throat as if lined with thorns. For a horrifying second, he couldn’t pull in a breath, and then the mass dislodged and splattered onto the floor, allowing the taste of blood to take its place as Tommy shakily slumped against the wall, dizzy and utterly exhausted.

It might have lasted minutes or hours. Then: “Are you okay?”

Tommy blinked, and realized through the haze that there were muddy boots in front of him, and remembered promptly that he’d invited a cannibalistic creature into his room. Right. Cool. Hopefully it was murder time, because Tommy was way too tired to actually have to ask for death.

The creature was now fully in the room, crouching in front of Tommy, hands hovering but not touching. Tommy also noticed that the bedside lamp was now turned on. “Do you... need water, or...?”

Tommy grimaced, and flopped a hand in the direction of the pack of plastic water bottles beside his bed. Surprisingly, the thing complied, and it walked over to retrieve one, bringing it to Tommy.

The water washed away the taste of blood, but provided only a weak relief to how raw his throat still felt. Everything just fucking ached and hurt, and Tommy put down the water bottle with no small amount of relief at no longer having to support the weight.



“You’re the one singing in the woods,” he said, although it was slurred and raspy with exhaustion. “Your voice sounds the same.”

The thing blinked in surprise, then smiled, crouched very close. “I am. Have you been listening to my songs?”

Tommy shrugged, and even that was an effort. The wall was supporting most of his weight. “Been hearing you the last few nights. Kinda glad you’re the thing that came here to kill me honestly. The other one was a fuck’n weirdo, standing around on the porch all creepy.”

Another blink. “I’m not here to kill you,” it said, and at the same time, Tommy heard something almost like a whisper in the back of his mind, that said: *I won’t kill you directly.*

Tommy felt hairs rise. That was weird, whatever it was. He eyed the creature, but it didn’t seem to have noticed anything wrong. “Alright, let’s say I believe you. What exactly are you here to do?”

It smiled sweetly again, just a bit wider than before. “I’ve been quite lonely, you see, looking for company. How about you come with me for a walk in the woods?”

The suggestion slipped into Tommy’s mind, and he couldn’t accurately describe the weird compulsion that came with it. Sticky like honey and just a sweet. A trap in every sense, although it was more comparable to an itch that Tommy wanted to scratch. Tempting as all hell, but possible to resist if he wanted to. Then the whisper in his brain came again, and with it all the force of compulsion dwindled to near nothing: *I want to lead you into the woods and you will never leave. You will walk and walk and keep walking, until your feet are bloody and broken. Searching for me but never finding me. You will walk until your death, and be all the happier for it and my company.*

Tommy eyed the thing again, which was holding out its hand, clusters of holes in the tight skin of its palm and along the length of its thumb flexing like honeycomb. “Well?” it asked. “Will you accompany me? I’ve been so very lonely.” *The last one I killed was so long ago. You will look so sweet when you are bloody and broken. Flesh is all the better when it is blistered open.*

Alright, Tommy may not be the smartest person, as Dream liked to remind him, but he was pretty sure he wasn’t supposed to be hearing the second echo. The siren song on its own was already fairly shitty at being alluring, basically a nagging voice that Tommy could swat away, but telling your victims you were going to make them walk until they died and then eat them was definitely not going to help. Whatever it was that Tommy was hearing, it was obvious that he was the only one hearing it.

“Not that walking to my death doesn’t sound fantastic,” Tommy began, heavy resignation in his mind. “But I’m afraid that’s not going to work. Tough luck. Can you kill me another way?”

“I-? What- but-“ the thing stammered, and its eyes went wide for a second, and it leaned away from Tommy. “I, um, I’m not here to kill you, kid. I already said that.” *I am here with almost the exclusive intention of killing you.*

“I absolutely believe you,” Tommy responded dryly, communicating how much he didn’t think that. “I still can’t walk with you in the woods. Can you just stab me with your claws or something?”

“I- Well.” The thing leaned even further back. “Are you sure you don’t want to come on a walk with me? It’ll be fun.” *I’ll have fun. You will die with bloody and broken feet as you walk and walk and walk and cannot stop-*

“No,” Tommy began, cutting off the weird second whisper in his skull that kept following what the thing said. “Not that I wouldn’t love to, but I physically can’t. You literally saw me cough up a whole bouquet a minute ago, not to mention my leg has been sort of fucked for a while now. A walk sounds like actual hell.”

“You’re not enthralled?” it asked, as if it wasn’t obvious.

In response, Tommy made a broad gesture. “I am entirely enthralled. You are obviously very good at whatever it is you’re doing. Stab me now.”

The creature looked at Tommy, eyes flicking around as if searching for something, the blistered holes in its eyelids pulsing slightly when it blinked. Tommy had no idea why he was still alive. It had sharp claws and teeth, and Tommy could be knocked over by a spring breeze right now, so he couldn’t fathom why it didn’t just attack him considering he was being as annoying as he could. “You... want to die?” *I have no idea what’s going on.*

Tommy shrugged. “I’m going to die either way. Just figured get’n stabbed was a hell of a lot better than slowly suffocating over what’s probably going to end up being another couple weeks. Why would I have let you in if I didn’t have a death wish?”

The thing kept staring at him, mouth opening and closing for a moment like it wanted to pretend to be a fish instead of a person. “...Because you like my singing? You wanted to hear more of it, and my voice.”

“Singing is not so bad,” Tommy agreed. “Your voice is actually pretty shit though. You could probably try singing again, that might compel me.”

The creature actually made a face at him, sticking out a bit of its tongue through its teeth and narrowing its eyes, but lost interest immediately after. Tommy noted that its tongue had holes in it too. Trypophobic bastard.

It rocked back a bit, eyes suddenly leaving him and flittering across the room. There wasn’t much to see. Dream sometimes gave him things when he was being good, but those items were always taken again later as punishment. As far as Dream was concerned, everything in the house was his. Tommy had nothing that belonged to him. All there really was in his room was his bed, a pack of water bottles, empty shelves, and a dresser with a few sets of clothes. Nothing that ever implied that Tommy lived here, aside from the fuckton of flower petals all over the carpet and the bed.

“You said you were going to suffocate,” it said at length, fingers bending in an odd motion as it picked up a stray purple petal off the carpet. Gross. “On... flower petals?” It turned to him.

“Is that normal for humans?”

“I mean, it’s not a common thing,” Tommy said, wondering why he was now giving the probably cannibalistic inhuman eldritch terror a lesson on human health. “It’s a pretty rare condition, I’m pretty sure, it’s like a curse or something supernatural. You just fuck’n, start growing flowers in your lungs ‘n shit. It’s like asthma but way more fucking annoying.”

“And it kills you?” the thing continued, sounding hesitant.

Tommy made a face. “Not so much anymore. I think it’s treatable to some degree, but not curable medically or whatever. You need like, friendship to make it go away, or really fuck’n strong medication.” A pause. “But me, yeah, it’s probably going to kill me soon, I’d say another few weeks tops. It’ll have gotten lethal when I start hacking up whole flowers, which hasn’t happened yet, but I’m optimistic.”

“It’s painful.”

“It’s pretty shit, yeah,” Tommy agreed, idly. Without real explanation, he found himself reaching forward, and the creature tensed up as Tommy grabbed onto one of its hands. He wasn’t even sure what he was trying to do, provoke it maybe, but the weird texture beneath his fingers distracted him for a moment. It was sort of like skin, but had a rubbery, kind of bloated feel to it, like a body that had been sitting in a lake too long. The thing sort of smelled like a lake too, but Tommy wasn’t the essence of good hygiene either, so he wasn’t going to comment.

“What are you doing?” it asked, and there was almost a faint buzz to the words, like static, like the second voice that came after was tuned to the wrong station.

Tommy mumbled something distractedly, then got back to the task at hand. He took the hand, tense beneath his fingertips, and raised it carefully to his throat, until he could feel the weird talons brush against the thin skin. “I’m teaching you to stab,” Tommy told it simply, holding back a shiver when its nail dug a little deeper as he spoke. “Since you obviously have no idea how to, which is just sad, honestly. Stabbing is one of life’s greatest joys. I’ve stabbed so many people, you have no idea.”

The cryptid tugged, trying to get its hand loose, but Tommy wasn’t budging on this. “I don’t kill that way,” it said, sounding insulted. “Just take a walk with me in the woods.”

“Ha!” Tommy said, relinquishing the hand. “You admit that you do want to kill me!”

“Maybe, who knows! I bet you’ll find out the answer if you come with me,” the thing stressed, and Tommy realized that there was that compulsion, but it was so weak now. It was like a hamster trying to push him off a cliff. Not going to happen.

“I told you already, I would if I could but physically I can’t,” Tommy said. “My own lungs would kill me before the walk would, and then that’d defeat the point of being killed by a monster.”

“So that’s how you’re resisting?” the thing demanded, raising its voice a bit more. “Because- Because you’re bad at walking?!”

“Hey fuck you! I’m the best at walking! You’re just bad at your job!”

“My job??”

“Yeah, luring kids to their death! You’re terrible at it! I’m a kid, and I haven’t died once yet and we’ve been talking for like five minutes. Zero stars,” Tommy informed him, and in the back of his mind he realized that somehow Dream had not been woken up yet, despite the fact that they were borderline yelling now. “Even if you could lure me, you’d probably just make me follow you back through the window or something, and I’ve already fallen out a window before and it didn’t kill me, so you’re going to have to try something else.”

“I can’t kill you that way!” it protested.

“Because you’re a pussy,” Tommy snarked back.

“I’m not- I’m not a pussy, you little shit! That’s just not how I cull my victims, it’s uncouth-“

"Meh meh meh, I’m a big scary monster with sharp teeth and claws but I’m too much of a pussy to use them! That’s you. That’s what you sound like,” Tommy stressed. Come one, Dream would’ve hit him by now for that much sass, bedridden or not, this creature had to have a breaking point. Tommy was damn sure he was going to find it.

The cryptid recoiled from him with an offended hiss. “You’re the worst.”

“Kill me then, pussy,” Tommy shot back.

For a moment, they just glared at each other.

Then of course that fucking tickle rose up in the back of his throat again, and Tommy had to suspend the staring contest in favour of hacking up a small handful of flower petals, but after a brief moment to recover he was right back to glaring. Unfortunately, the grade A pussy wasn’t glaring back anymore. Instead it was considering him again, eyes flicking down to the flower petals then back up at his face.

“Fine,” it decided, eyeing him. “I’ll help you.”

“I believe you mean kill me.”

“I swear to fuck-! Just- What’s your name, kid?” it bit out, hands curled into fists at its side.

Now, if this thing was fae, which it probably wasn’t, then Tommy was pretty sure all sorts of horrible shit could happen if he gave it his name. So, on the off chance that it could be fae, Tommy didn’t hesitate. “Tommy.”

“Great. I’m Wilbur, and while I can’t kill you myself-“

“Because you’re a bitch.”

“-I do know someone who can kill you, quite thoroughly.” There was a wicked grin on Wilbur the Bitch’s face, that probably should have been terrifying, but Tommy would rather describe it as punchable.

“Great, phone them up, get them over here,” Tommy demanded, snapping his fingers.  
“Anyone will do a better job of killing me than your pussy ass.”

“He’ll come by tomorrow night,” Wilbur said with forced calmness, although Tommy could definitely see one eye twitching. “All you have to do is unlock your back door.”

Tommy immediately thought back to the other night. The thing pretending to have a human face standing on the porch step. Until it had looked at him, it had sort of just seemed like some guy. Sure, that artificial terror was a nightmare to experience, but at least Tommy wouldn’t be alive to experience it for long.

“Alright,” Tommy agreed easily. Fuck, now he had to get down the stairs without getting caught by Dream, which was going to be a nightmare and a half, but he could manage it. He had the motivation now.

“If you’re sure that’s what you want,” it said, and rose to its feet. It was a pretty tall fucker, and Tommy felt no small amount of temptation to kick the back of its knees, just to be a prick. Something stopped him though, and it was probably the way the creature was looking at him. For once its face was unreadable, mouth set in a line, human eyes staring at him, its brows scrunching just a bit. “I’ll warn you, my friend he’s... thorough. He’s not like me. Doesn’t do smalltalk. If you leave your backdoor unlocked tomorrow night, that’s it. No chance to take it back.”

Tommy felt it, that part of his mind that had some survival instincts call out, worried, regretting, wondering. More of his mind, however, was just done. A sort of apathy that didn’t bother changing his mind. He was going to be dead soon anyway. And when he thought about it, about suffocating in a bed alone with nobody but Dream, the person who’d condemned him to this in the first place... well, there wasn’t really much of a decision to be made.

“Yeah, well, let me worry about the regrets,” Tommy muttered, looking to the side. “Just hold up your end. He better be here tomorrow.”

The creature- Wilbur looked at him again. Its eyes were always jarringly human, sort of like an angler fish’s lure, Tommy thought. Something familiar to hold onto and to draw you in. Now, Wilbur’s eyes looked almost softer, a sort of pitying expression on his face as he ducked through the window, back to the outside.

“Bye, Tommy,” it said. “We won’t be meeting again.” It seemed almost sad about that fact, and Tommy tried to ignore it, tried to ignore the feeling that twisted his gut, that nearly sent flower petals into his throat.

“Thank fuck for that,” he bit out. “Small miracles. Go fuck yourself, Wilbur.” There wasn’t any venom to it this time.

Then Wilbur was gone. One moment it was crouched on the sill like the world's worst Batman cosplayer, the next Tommy whipped around as the lightbulb in his lamp shattered, and when he turned back Wilbur was just gone. Tommy peered out the window, but there weren't any shadows or anything. It was just quiet. Then the singing started up again.

He felt that weak compulsion humm in his mind, but this time he didn't stick around to listen. He just closed and latched the window, pulled the curtains together, and tried to pick up the flower petals scattered around the area in the complete dark, getting rid of the evidence before Dream figured out what he'd been doing every night.

Then... Well, then it was time to go downstairs.

The moon was full and high in the sky, so it must be the middle of the night. There were no clocks in Tommy's room, so he just had to hope that Dream kept a reasonable sleep schedule.

His door handle was cold when he touched it, and when he pulled it open there was only an empty hallway nearly shrouded in total darkness. He sucked in a breath, and carefully moved forward, keeping his footsteps as light as he could, bracing himself on the wall to help his limp. After long moments with his breathing and his steps as the only sounds, he reached the staircase.

Here he paused again. If Dream woke up now, Tommy could just make up the excuse that he was on his way to the bathroom. The instant his feet touched the stairs though, there would be no excuse convincing enough.

He could see some glimpses of the downstairs from here. A bit of the kitchen and living room. Places he hadn't entered in over a month. The temptation to see them again was enough to kick start him into action.

He closed his eyes, counted to three, then braced himself heavily on the railings as he took the first step down, putting almost no weight on his right leg, which was pulsing dully with a pain that Tommy could ignore. Another step, using his left leg first again, then pulling both feet to the same point. His arms weren't quite enough on their own to take all his weight, so this was the best he could do.

It was slow going, the staircase tantalizingly tall, even though a year ago it hadn't been. He used to have climbed it daily, and it meant nothing. Now it was an obstacle that took all his strength just to get past.

After minutes and minutes went by, finally Tommy's hands reached the ends of the railing, and his foot stepped onto the solid floor of the downstairs. He had to stop, his breathing too shaky and erratic, his right leg now sending out a solid agony, even as he tried to keep as much weight off it as he could.

In the dark, the downstairs was like a different world. Devoid of life and empty, made of shadows and pale moonlight, with no sound to it besides the hum of the kitchen fridge and the ticking of a clock Tommy never noticed before. It loomed at him like a stale memory. A place that he never thought he'd see again.

Carefully, he slid himself forward, and made it four steps before the urge to cough arose to his horror. Fuck, he couldn't afford flower petals downstairs, Dream might actually kill him.

He shoved his shirt over his mouth, trying to seal his lips and block his coughs as best he could. It was a short fit, thank god, just a few hacks and he managed to gather the petals and slip them into a pocket. Still, he twisted to look around himself, making sure that none had slipped past and the floor was still empty and clean.

When he realized the back door was in sight, Tommy almost stopped again. His arms felt shaky from where he was bracing himself against walls, trying to ease his weight as much as he could. The door to the backyard was like a beacon, simple in design. A wooden door with a window on the top half, the curtains drawn closed, fluttering down with just enough length to surreptitiously cover the door handle. Conveniently, that also meant the lock would be out of sight.

Somehow, those last few steps became easier as they became rushed, Tommy practically stumbling over himself as he found his hands bracing themselves on the door, feeling rough wood against his palms.

Then his hands slid down, and if the doorknob in his room had been cold, this one was frigid enough to hurt. Tommy breathed. Tried to breathe. Felt like his lungs were tighter than usual. His fingers were clearly trembling from where they lay on the lock.

It was something drilled into every kid, even ones without real families like Tommy. It was the same in every town and every city, double for those more segregated. If there were monsters feasting, then never unlock any door or any window at night. Never pull back the curtains. If they see you, they will hunt you. If they can get to you, then they will. Locks will stop them, but any child foolish enough to unlatch the window for a breath of fresh air was dead meat. Even when a monster wasn't inhabiting a location nearby, people usually still kept their shit locked up tight at night, just in case.

Everything Tommy had done the last week had gone directly against every lesson he'd ever been taught. Every instinct that had been hammered into his brain. Yet he kept doing it. Over and over again, telling himself that he wasn't stupid, just desperate. Maybe those were just two words for the same thing.

If he did this, then there was no going back. If he did this, then he'd die. That was the end of it.

It was a weird mix of cold dread and warm relief. His stomach was twisted uncomfortably, almost to the point of being sick. He was sweating and shivering.

All Tommy had to do, in the end, was picture what would happen if he left the door locked and turned back now. He'd go back to bed, wake up, stay away from the window, and let Dream keep playing caretaker for as long as the man wanted. He'd sit in the same bed, read the same books, stare at the same walls, and feel his lungs get tighter and tighter as the flowers grew. At some point, in maybe days or weeks, entire bulbs of alliums would leave his throat, and he'd choke on them, and then there would be no more air. Tommy would suffocate alone in his room without anyone who'd ever known him the wiser, or worse, with

Dream at his bedside. The same man who did this to him, who condemned Tommy to his death, would be smiling as if ignorant to his own actions and inaction, his eyes shining with pity the whole way out.

Yeah, fuck that.

The deadbolt was almost too easy to twist away, the solid thunk of it deafening in the emptiness of downstairs. Tommy's breathing was heavy and ragged, the taste of blood in his mouth as he gritted his teeth.

He pulled his hand away as if the door had burned him, hypnotized by the way that the curtains fell back into place easily, hiding the evidence of what he'd done as if this was nothing more than a child hiding a broken toy. Tommy spent the last year dying, but only now did it actually sink in how real it was.

One way or another, all of this would end. One way or another, Tommy would be dead. The only questions were how and when.

Tommy turned and left, beginning the shaky, painful journey back upstairs.

Behind him, the door remained silent and waiting. Ready for the next visitor.

Unlocked.

## Chapter End Notes

Wilbur, casually entrancing his next victim: anyway come with me into the forest :D

Tommy, casually not entranced: fuck you bitch

Wilbur, panicking because this has never happened before: can I pay you like ten dollars to come into the forest anyway

Honestly things can only go uphill from here.



# My Eulogy Came Knocking

## Chapter Summary

There is something in the house.

## Chapter Notes

I've discovered there seems to be an ongoing debate as to whether this fic will be really sad or really funny.

Mmm.

Warnings:

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, child abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, blood and injury, manipulation, neglect, isolation, horror elements

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Suffice to say, Tommy didn't get back to sleep that night.

He managed to get back into his room without a problem, if you considered a constant sharp throbbing pain from his leg with each step not a problem. Of course, once he was back, he realized that he had an actual issue on his hands. He'd cleaned up the flower petals by the window before his trek downstairs, but as he stared at his bed, eyes adjusted to the dark, he realized he'd forgotten about the lightbulb in his lamp that had shattered when Wilbur left.

Glass shards littered the floor and bedside table, and even if he carefully put them in the trash, his lamp would still very obviously be missing a bulb. And, Dream was aware that the porch light had also shattered the night before.

Fuck. Dream would totally connect the dots.

There was a near primal instinct in Tommy to hide the evidence. To throw a shirt over the lamp or throw it out the window or try to hide it some-fucking-how even if it didn't make sense. Not just because Dream would know about the nighttime visits but also because Dream didn't tolerate broken shit, period.

Tommy knew that fact to the core, so his brain responded with a panicked static, even if deep inside he knew what he had to do. Carefully, Tommy took a breath, and eased himself back to sit on his bed. Then, with almost glassy eyes, he reached forward and swiped the lamp off the bedside table, wincing as it hit the floor. He wiped all the glass pieces to the ground as well with his sleeve, and stared at the mess as if it would make any more sense in his head.

He'd just... bumped the table too hard. The lamp had fallen and broken. It was an accident. It was an accident. It was always an accident but anything Tommy did was always purposeful, Dream said, he knew that-

Tommy mechanically swung his legs back into bed, pulling the blankets over himself as he settled back in and tolerated another coughing fit when it came. Blood filled his mouth, but what else was new.

The pillows propped him up so he was sitting, and his hands curled into his blankets as he stared unseeing at the far wall of his room. He might sleep. He might not. At this point there wasn't really a difference.

He just kept staring, mind blank with a sort of staticky panic, and somehow time passed.

Slowly, light built up behind the curtains of his windows, and when he heard Dream get up, footsteps creaking, he flinched despite himself. Then he just waited, and kept waiting, hearing Dream go downstairs and felt panic well up again, because even if the lock was hidden, what if Dream went to double check it anyway? He always checked Tommy's window now every time he visited, maybe he did the same for the rest of the house. Fuck. Tommy was fucked. He should have tried to unlock the door tonight instead and just waited downstairs for his death. Shit, he'd fucked this up.

Eventually, the staircase creaked as Dream came back upstairs, and Tommy braced himself. He pulled a book onto his lap but didn't open it, just for the sake of appearances. Suppressed a flinch when the door to his room opened as Dream never knocked.

"Good morning," Dream said, sounding in a good mood. He was holding a tray in his hands, breakfast on it. His smile dropped almost instantly though, when his eyes flashed from Tommy to the lamp to the mess on the ground. "Tommy," he said, and his tone was still light. "What happened here?"

"G-Good morning, Dream," Tommy wheezed, and fuck there was already a coughing fit. He struggled through it as Dream got closer, placing the tray on the dresser. "S-Sorry, I didn't-I-" The words never came, panic creeping past apathy, the survival part of his brain taking over, trying to keep the punishment from coming, trying to salvage all of this even if he knew that it wouldn't work, he was so tired-"I- I tried to get up earlier an- and there was another fit and I hit the table. The- The lamp fell. I'm sorry about that Dream. I'm so sorry. It was an accident, I wouldn't- I'm sorry." He kept repeating it. Kept apologizing on autopilot without putting much thought into it. Sometimes it helped. Nine times out of ten it didn't, but sometimes. Sometimes Dream didn't punish him, if he was in a good enough mood.

Dream still wasn't saying anything more, crouching down to look closer at the wreckage. Tommy bit his lip, wondering if it was convincing enough. If the lamp looked like it had

fallen on its own and that Tommy didn't try to orchestrate this situation-

"That's a shame," Dream said, his voice still steady and even and giving nothing away. "I really liked this lamp, I picked it out for you."

Tommy's breathing stalled without his consent, even if the part of his brain that still clung to clarity knew for a fact that Dream probably couldn't give less of a shit about the lamp. He always said these sorts of things, to justify what would happen next. Guilt still rose up regardless, as it always did, cloying Tommy's throat alongside the flower petals. Annoyingly difficult to smother, even with the ever-present blanket of apathy.

"I'm sorry Dream," Tommy repeated, falling into yet another coughing fit again as he did so, and his throat hurt so fucking bad. There was nothing to do that would make the situation better. Tommy knew that deeply and intimately. His body still automatically went through the motions though, trying to find a way out, even as the clearer part of his mind had already settled down, knowing what would come and that he, as always, was helpless to stop Dream.

His leg ached with a pain more phantom than physical.

Dream clicked his tongue, and started carefully picking up pieces of glass from the carpet, holding them in his open palm. When he had a small pile, he stood back up and turned to Tommy. "Hand."

Tommy didn't hesitate anymore. He used to protest or move away or flinch or do something. But he could never stop Dream. After two years, he couldn't be bothered to disobey anymore. It was just easier to go along with things, even as his stomach twisted and his gut sank.

Tommy held out his hand, palm up, and he already had a hunch of what was going to happen. Dream had used this punishment a number of times before.

The glass pieces fell into Tommy's palm. Bright and glittering against thin flesh. Then Dream carefully took Tommy's hand and curled in his fingers, forcing his fist just a bit tight.

The pain was smooth and easy, glass breaking into his skin. It could have been worse- had been worse in the past. Dream could have pressed his hand closed much harder, but for now Dream seemed to be satisfied with the blood that leaked and dripped onto the bed.

"You're right Tommy," Dream said, pulling away and leaving Tommy's hand curled around the glass. Tommy felt Dream's fingers begin to card through his hair. "It was an accident. Looks like you got hurt too. You'll have to be more careful in the future, won't you Tommy? You're always bringing these things on yourself, you know how much I hate to see you hurt."

Tommy's breathing was shallow again, and his hand was shaking, wet with blood. The pain was distant, that didn't matter. Closer was the cut of Dream's words. How it was Tommy's fault he was hurt. How the injury was an accident that Tommy caused. Dream had nothing to do with this, the blood and pain was all because of Tommy.

The worst part was that it took less than a year of living with Dream for Tommy to start to believe it. Even now, when Tommy was aware of it, aware of how Dream would word things,

he couldn't say exactly which of his scars were genuinely his own fault, and which Dream told him were his fault. The memories were always cluttered and confused, and had only been brought to clarity in recent months. Then, Tommy was just apathetic.

Even as Tommy lay in bed, feeling the usual throbbing pain in his leg, he thought that he might have broken it after falling out his old bedroom's window. Other times... he thought that it might have been- might have been- But it was always hard to force those memories into clarity. It wasn't worth it, in the end, and wouldn't change anything.

"Tommy. Your hand."

Tommy blinked, finding himself on his bed with Dream beside him, his hand resting on his lap with glass digging into his palm and his curled fingers, blood slickening it, and realized that he'd zoned out. Dream reached forward across the bed, and Tommy let him, watching without really seeing as Dream carefully unfolded his fingers, revealing his mangled palm and welling blood and bits of glass.

Dream tssked, setting Tommy's hand back onto the bed. "Sit tight, Tommy, alright? I'm just going to get the medkit and then this'll all be better."

So Tommy sat. Waited. His hand hurt but it wasn't too bad, Dream could have forced the glass deeper, and it wasn't his dominant hand. Dream had gone easy on him. He couldn't deal punishments that involve kicking or punches anymore, but Dream still found a way.

Dream came back, sat down on the edge of the bed, and worked easily and quickly to pull the glass from Tommy's palm. The cuts were cleaned and bandaged, none bad enough to need stitching, and Dream was setting the kit aside, his face set in the tellings of a good mood.

"I almost forgot, I made breakfast for you!" he announced, as if he didn't always make Tommy breakfast because Tommy couldn't go downstairs anymore.

Dream grabbed the tray from the dresser and swept his way over, settling it in Tommy's lap. On it was an omelet, cold now, and a glass of orange juice.

Tommy stared at it. He used to be excited and grateful when Dream made him breakfast. It had been a treat for good behaviour most of the time, before it became the norm. Now Tommy found that as usual, he had little appetite. He picked up the fork anyway, because Dream didn't like it when his gifts were rejected, and poked at his breakfast a bit. He took a small bite, then two, tasting nothing, as Dream swept around his room, cleaning up the rest of the lamp and tossing it and the rest of the glass into the garbage.

Tommy just managed his third bite, finding it difficult and painful to swallow, when the flowers clawed at his throat and lungs again, and a coughing fit took over. Fuck, it was one of the bad ones again, petals near clogging his throat as he hacked them up, and it went on for a few minutes. At some point Dream was at his bedside again, running his hand in circles on Tommy's back or carding through his hair, moving the tray out of the way.

Tommy didn't notice it much, too overwhelmed with the fit, pain spiking through his chest and his throat feeling raw, nearly choking as finally the mass of petals came free, spat onto

his blanket. Tommy stared at the small mound, aching and sore and dizzy, knowing that things were getting worse. There were too many petals now.

Dream noticed too.

“When did this start?” he asked, reaching for a tissue to wipe up the ball of petals. “It didn’t used to be clumped like this.”

Tommy managed a shrug, but fuck, everything hurt. He slumped against his pillows, blinking spots out of his eyes and staring at his ceiling. “I ‘unno. Always get’n worse, I guess,” he slurred.

“Oh I know, Tommy,” Dream soothed. “I’m trying to make it better.”

Ah yes, making it better by never taking Tommy to the doctor and confiscating his medicine when he did manage to get it. Truly, Dream was the pinnacle of someone who was on Tommy’s side.

“Is o’kay,” Tommy mumbled, playing along, knowing Dream expected him to be grateful. The tray was placed back on his lap and Tommy stared at the omelet now seasoned with flower petals, his entire stomach churning uncomfortably. He didn’t know if he’d even be able to keep what he ate down.

He picked up the fork again anyway, and poked at the eggs, moving them around the plate without really seeing them.

Dream, meanwhile, amused himself elsewhere again, wandering across the room to prod at the window, checking that the curtains were in place and the panes of glass were locked. Tommy kept nudging at his food, trying to see if there was any part of himself that felt remotely like eating.

It wasn’t like he was going to be alive much longer, so it probably didn’t matter. None of anything that happened today really mattered. Hunger, or the cuts on his hand, wouldn’t bother him when he died. He could handle it for however many more hours, and then a guest would come from the forest to their house, and that would be the end of it. Tommy would just be another missing person, if there was anyone who would even notice him missing in the first place.

“Tommy.”

Tommy jerked at that, eyes flashing to Dream, because the tone hadn’t been happy or sympathetic. Instead it was flat and low, worse than when Dream had seen the broken lamp.

Dream was still standing at Tommy’s window, and when he turned, Tommy saw with sinking horror the purple flower petal in his grip. “Tommy, what were you doing at the window?”

“I- I wasn’t at the window, Dream, I swear,” Tommy stammered instantly, part of his mind already panicking and pleading on autopilot while the other part just sunk into silent acceptance and despair. “I haven’t been for weeks, I don’t- Petals get places but I didn’t-“

“Tommy,” Dream said, silencing him instantly. “I found this trapped under the window pane. You opened the window.” It couldn’t be farther from a question.

“I didn’t Dream, I wouldn’t- you know I wouldn’t-!”

Dream was walking towards him, and Tommy flinched away. Dream’s arm swung out and the tray was knocked off, plate shattering on the floor and bits of egg flying. His other hand snaked around Tommy’s wrist, curling painfully tight and jerking him forward harshly until their faces were inches apart.

“I told you, Tommy. I told you again and again, and I expected to at least be listened to. You told me, to my face Tommy, that you would not open that window! That you would not even draw back those curtains! I thought I could trust you to keep yourself safe.”

“Dream, please,” Tommy whispered, petals rising up his throat.

Dream’s grip turned bruising, his nails digging in enough to leave marks. “You can’t be trusted Tommy. I see that now.” Dream yanked hard, pulling Tommy from the bed, and Tommy scrambled to remain on his feet as he was viciously jolted forward again, just managing to avoid stepping on the plate shards. “I’ll fucking fix this. I’m going to keep you safe Tommy, I promise you.”

“Dream, don’t-“ Tommy tried, but he couldn’t breathe and couldn’t speak, and then the coughing came. The fit was quick and harsh but Dream wasn’t stopping. He didn’t care that Tommy could barely walk. He just mercilessly dragged him forward and Tommy struggled not to fall, each step on his right leg sending spikes of pain that threatened to make him black out, but he couldn’t-!

They were out of his room and then down the hall, passing the staircase in a blur of motion. Tommy, through the haze of pain and coughing and panic, realized this was the direction of his old room. “-Please!”

The door was thrown open, and suddenly Dream hauled him forward and let go, and without support Tommy went sprawling to the floor, pain flashing up his body as his shoulder hit the hardwood, his head following.

He gasped, struggling to pull air into his lungs through the pain and the coughing fit that was still ongoing, and he shuddered and curled up, trying to find a position that he could draw in air, tears in his eyes. Dream was gone one moment, and then he was back. Tommy had enough awareness to twist out of the way, shoving himself against the wall even as his chest heaved.

Dream, he realized, was pushing a large piece of plywood against the window in the room. There was a drill in his other hand and then- the loud noise of it whirling caused Tommy to flinch back, and his mind struggled to keep up as Dream secured the plywood over the window, putting in screw after screw in a haphazard mess until it showed now signs of budging when he pulled on it.

Then he whirled around on Tommy, and Tommy tried his best to curl up and make himself small, breathing erratic and vision fuzzy. “You are not leaving Tommy. I don’t know how many times I need to say this but I am keeping you safe. You drove me to do this. This is what you deserve.”

Then Dream was gone, and Tommy realized the door was closing and even as he reached out he heard it click shut-! The sound of a key in the lock was audible, and Tommy felt his whole stomach drop.

Fuck-! Fuck, no no no no Dream didn’t- he wouldn’t-

Somehow Tommy managed to crawl his way over to the door, hands reaching up to twist around the knob and it wouldn’t- it didn’t move, and Tommy had been trapped in this room enough times to know that it never would.

Tommy couldn’t breath as he whipped around, taking everything in. The room was still near empty from when he’d moved out of it, though Dream had tried to make it his office. There was a desk and stacks of boxes and a half assembled chair. The window was covered in fucking plywood. It was fucking empty and Tommy was alone and- and no one would find him.

“Dream!” Tommy screamed, even if his throat already hurt and even if the force of it ached. “Dream let me out! Dream please! Dream!” It always went unheard, and yet Tommy kept doing it anyway. He found himself pounding his fists against the door, his coughing fit having subsided only for him to start yelling in its place, his voice high, reedy, cracking, and desperate.

He was crying. He was calling out. There was never an answer and the walls of the room felt so close even if they weren’t. At least it wasn’t a closet. At least Dream hadn’t beaten him to a pulp first. But Tommy was still fucking trapped and he couldn’t get out, and he had no idea how long Dream expected him to stay here except-

Tommy swallowed. Until the hunters came, he realized. It could take days more for them to arrive. And the door-

Tommy realized all at once through a second haze of panic that a monster would be coming tonight and Tommy might not be there. He might not be able to escape this stupid room, and he might miss his death, and somehow that made Tommy panic even more, redoubling his efforts of escape even when his knuckles were scrapped from pounding on the door and his voice was gone and lost. Even as his eyes burned and he curled up tight, just trying to somehow breathe. Coughing over and over and over, petals surrounding him. Bright alliums in a halo around his body.

Time passed.

It always did.

Dream never let him out.

Tommy was curled tight in the dark, the only light coming from under the door and through the thinnest cracks around the plywood. He tried pulling on it. Tried to dig his nails under the wood and pull even if the screws didn't let him. His fingernails were torn and ragged and his fingertips bled with splinters and Tommy was scared.

Dream wouldn't answer him, no matter how much he begged. Tommy knew that. Still, he hoped that somehow for once he was wrong, that this time would be different. He had to get out, he had to, he had to!

Hours went by.

There weren't any clocks in the room, but Tommy was aware of it anyway. At some point he just curled up in the corner by the door, knees to his chest, head buried, half conscious. His breathing was raspy and slow from where he pulled in one shallow lungful after another. Every ten minutes was another coughing fit.

He was just tired, in the end. When the adrenaline wore out and the panic faded there was nothing left. Just an all encompassing exhaustion, the weight of his limbs, the sting of his hand, the ache of his leg. His mind gave up again. Nothing would ever change.

He coughed, hacking up clumps of petals that left him breathless, silently crying from the pain. His chest was impossibly tight and painful, struggling each time to pull in air. He was dying. He was always fucking dying. He just wasn't ready to be alone for it.

Time.

More time.

Even the thin light grew dark, and Tommy was horribly aware of the approach of evening and then night. Knew that the deadline was coming fast, and he was helpless to meet it.

No light came from beyond the plywood. Then, after so long trapped in this room, he heard Dream clamber up the stairs, walk down the hall, and retire to bed. He never freed Tommy, all he did was turn the hallway light off, plunging Tommy's room into permanent darkness.

Tommy had already tried to flip the lightswitch, but apparently Dream had gone to the breakerbox and cut electricity from the room, just to be a bitch. He'd done it before, and Tommy really should have expected it.

It was just silence and darkness, Tommy not even able to make out the shadow of the desk. He tried not to panic and feel the walls closing in, and instead just counted each breath. Over and over.

Over and over.

Over and over.

Over and-

Knocking.



Tommy jerked up, skipping a breath, his daze suddenly broken by something- then it came again, a second knock Tommy now realized, echoing easily through the house with no other noise to compete with it. Tommy's eyes were wide, and he flinched when the third knock came.

Somehow, he heard the slow creak of the back door knob turn, but that was impossible. Tommy was upstairs on the other side of the house and yet- He heard it. The small squeal of protest from the hinges as the door swung opened. Then, more audibly than anything: footsteps.

It wasn't, Tommy realized without breathing, the *click click* of the not-man from the night before. Instead the footsteps were a *fsssh thump, fsssh thump*. The sound of something dragging before landing heavily, betraying that whatever was behind them was fucking huge. *Fsssh thump. Fsssh thump.*

Tommy crowded up against the door, pushing his ear against it, finding goosebumps covering his skin. There was something moving downstairs, the rustle of fabric, the heavy footsteps that seemed to shake the supports of the house. The steps squelched almost, Tommy realized with a sink to his gut. Like they were wet.

It reached the stairs. Tommy heard every step creak.

It was upstairs.

Fuck, it was upstairs and there were so many rooms-!

Tommy threw a fist against the door, wincing as his bloody knuckles hit it and the resounding echo in the quiet house it caused. The footsteps had stopped. Tommy gritted his teeth and knocked again, then a third time, spacing out the sounds in the same manner the creature had knocked at the downstairs door.

Finally, the *fsssh thump* started again, a heavy and dragging lumbering. It got closer. Closer. The last step was outside the door, close enough that Tommy flinched. He could actually smell it now, stale and rusted, and knew the scent enough to recognize it was blood. Overwhelming, powerful, and foreboding.

He hadn't taken a breath this whole time, and found that even if he wanted to, he couldn't speak, his voice gone from screaming.

A knock came, loud and deafening, and Tommy scooted back despite himself. He held still for the second and third, anticipating them this time, and his heart felt a tiny thrill at how the thing kept the same weird pauses between each pound.

Then, the doorknob turned.

Tommy could hear it in the dark, the slight squeal as it moved ever so slowly. Turned. Turned. Until it got stuck.

The door was pushed, bumping forward, but the lock held. The door was jiggled a few more times, doorknob turned slowly back and forth, but it never gave. Then, the knob slid back into place, the *fsssh thumps* started up again, and the creature began to move away.

No! No absolutely not!

Tommy threw his fists against the door again, panicking, because was it joking? It couldn't open one door? Couldn't break it down? The thing sounded massive and terrifying and it couldn't get through one lock?!

Tommy tried to call, tried to scream, but his voice was nothing more than a painful rasp, and the tears were hot when they came, the coughing unbearable with the stench of blood thick in the air.

He curled up with his forehead pressed against the door, just listening to the footsteps move away and down the hall. Farther and farther from him, and Tommy was alone. He was alone in this room and Dream would probably never let him out again. Tommy was going to die without even a window to the outside world, he was-

In his thoughts, he didn't realize that the footsteps had gone quiet briefly. Not until they returned, and Tommy realized without knowing what it meant that there was a new sound. After each *fsssh thump* was a dragging noise.

It was heavy and rough against the carpet.

When the thing reached the stairs again, it was worse. There was a resounding second thump on each step after the footsteps, that sounded with a distinct wet squelch.

Tommy shivered. He still had goosebumps, he could still smell the blood. But he didn't- he didn't want it to fucking leave! It was leaving, and Tommy was still here. He'd been left behind, he couldn't rely on anyone, not even eldritch fucking monsters apparently! Not Wilbur, not the not-man, not the big thing moving through his house! No one was ever on his side, no one would ever help him, and Tommy felt his own nails biting into his arms but he couldn't stop himself.

The thing left, its footsteps heading back towards the downstairs door, still dragging whatever it was, until Tommy couldn't hear it anymore. It was gone. It was fucking gone! It was gone it was gone it was gone-!

And Tommy was still here.

Tommy, who was alone without anyone, who had flowers growing into his throat to throw him into another overwhelming coughing fit, hugging his legs to his chest with his arms wrapped around them, and hoping that this was all a nightmare he could wake up from.

Apparently, Dream had never realized that the back door had been unlocked.

Hurray for small miracles.

## Chapter End Notes

Optimistic commenters: wow, I can't wait for Tommy to annoy and befriend Techno :D  
Me, who knew exactly what chapter was coming next: yea about that

Strange, how some actions have unintended consequences. Anyway,

# A Ghost Said it's Time to Wake Up

## Chapter Summary

There is no one in the house.

## Chapter Notes

Wow, things really don't stop from keep happening, do they?

### Warnings

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Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, blood, injury, body horror, referenced child abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

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He could feel a tickling sensation along his arms and legs and the bottom of his feet. Soft things curled around his fingers as he dug them into the soil, feeling it clump beneath his nails. He breathed in, and the air was sweet and cloying.

When he opened his eyes, the sky was blue and clear above him. No sun, but it was bright and warm. A breeze passed by, ruffling his hair, and at the same time it sent the field of flowers dancing.

As he turned his head he saw them. An endless expanse of alliums that surrounded his body and the horizon, choking it. He tried to sit up, to escape them, but he was tangled. Their petals were sharp, he could feel them cut his skin when he struggled, but were soft when he was lying there.

With a surge of adrenaline he pulled one arm free, feeling wet blood drip down it and a sharp pain in each joint. It was enough to flex his hand in front of his face.

There was a flower growing on his hand. He could see the roots threading through his fingers, and at some points, they dipped into his skin as if it were soil.

He breathed in exactly once, and as he did the roots grew tighter, he was constrained more, stems tight around his body. He went to breathe again anyway, but there were flowers in his

mouth. The alliums were soft against his lips. They were soft and he couldn't breathe-

-

Tommy jolted awake when he heard knocking.

He had no recollection of falling asleep, but at some point the exhaustion must have won over with only vague memories of dawn in his mind. He realized, very quickly, that the room was a brighter now. Light highlighted the edges of the plywood covering the window, and he could feel a distinct dryness to his throat from thirst and twist to his stomach from hunger and fear. The smell of blood was still in the air, but at this point it was familiar company, although after his dream it was mixed with the sweet smell of flowers which made it all the more difficult to breathe.

Knocking came again, and instead of the slow, three-hit pattern the monsters seemed to favor, this was the rapid onslaught of a human at the front door of the house.

Tommy listened to it, unable to answer, feeling weirdly empty and dull inside. He could feel the shape of the flowers in his lungs almost distinctly, the way petals would caress the sides and threaten to send him coughing.

Dream didn't answered the door either, the floors void of his footsteps, and for a moment it felt like Tommy was the only one in the house.

Then, after a few minutes of no movement or sound besides the periodic knocking, the front door opened, and Tommy could hear people come in, although he was sure that he hadn't heard Dream go to answer it yet. Whatever, sometimes Dream's friends let themselves in.

Tommy found himself picking at his clothes, pulling at stray fibers, his eyes itchy and sore. His breathing hurt, a lot, but that was normal.

He just sat there, waiting for nothing in particular, listening to people walk around downstairs with muffled chatter, sharp edges to their voices, might as well being in a completely different world to him. It wasn't like he'd ever see their faces or know their names. They would visit Dream and never him.

Of course, that was when said people started climbing upstairs, slowly, carefully, and suddenly Tommy perked up just a bit more, because people never came upstairs. When they spoke, Tommy could hear what they were saying now with only a door and a bit of distance to divide them:

"Fuck, there's- there's so much, and it's... that's his bedroom. That's his fucking bedroom!"

"We shouldn't-"

"We need to know what happened. Dream's not stupid, he wouldn't have left his door open like that. Someone must have.. must have..."

"Does it matter now? We need to- to call a search party or something, find him before he-"

“Dies? George, there’s blood everywhere. He’s not- he probably didn’t-“

“We don’t know for certain yet, and until we do, I don’t care.”

George... then the other must be Sapnap. Dream’s friends. Tommy blinked, because he hadn’t talked to them in months, he’d almost forgotten what they even looked like.

But that was- they were people! They were people and they weren’t Dream, and Tommy’s scratched arms and cut hands ached and hurt but he pounded on the door one last time anyway. Why not. Even as the fear ate at him, he tried to convince himself that there wasn’t much more Dream could do to him for acting out, especially with witnesses. When they left though... well, maybe this time Dream would just kill him.

“Help!” he rasped, as loud as he could, but he doubted it helped much. “Help, please!”

Footsteps were rushing his way, but he’d been through this song and dance before. The doorknob rattled, quick and forceful. As always, the door didn’t open.

“Shit, it’s locked,” Sapnap hissed.

“Well maybe there’s a key-“ George suggested.

“No time. These doors are hollow, I can kick through them.”

“Why would you-“

“Whoever’s in there stand back!” Sapnap bellowed, and Tommy scrambled to fling himself back into the corner before there was a resounding *crack!* and the door jerked open, slamming against the wall.

See, that was what the monster should have done, Tommy thought in a daze of awe. He looked up, arms still protectively in front of his face, and felt like this was all a hallucination when Sapnap and George stumbled into the room, looking around frantically. With them came the smell of blood, overwhelming now.

For a moment, they just stared at each other. Tommy with hesitance, while Dream’s friends’ eyes went wide at the sight of him.

“Tommy?” George demanded, disbelief clear in his voice. “What are you doing here?”

“Fuck, I forgot about Tommy,” Sapnap hissed, and he dropped down into a crouch, holding out a hand. “It’s going to be okay, alright it’s- Shit, do you think Dream locked him in here to protect him? He must have known they were in danger, he...”

“What,” Tommy swallowed, tried again, but his throat hurt. “What happened to Dream?”

Both Sapnap and George fell very, very still and... and Tommy thought he already knew, but he still felt his eyes widen, his head filling with a distant static. He didn’t think twice before when Dream didn’t answer the door, when he footsteps were absent in the house. Thought that Dream might still be asleep, but now...

“Tommy,” Sapnap said, and his voice was soft. His hand was on Tommy’s shoulder, and the warmth of it burned. “Dream he’s... he’s gone, Tommy. Something broke into your house and- and he might not be okay, but we’re going to try to find him, alright? It’s going to be okay.”

Tommy paused, and halted, and things fell into place. The blood smell in the air. The way the monster had definitely entered another upstairs room last night. The dragging noise when it left. The fact that Dream hadn’t answered the door, that he was missing apparently. Well, missing is what Sapnap said. Tommy knew, feeling sick, that Dream had simply taken Tommy’s place. That was the only thing that made sense, because Tommy was still alive, and the monster was supposed to have killed him, but it didn’t. It killed Dream. It fucking killed Dream and not Tommy. Tommy was still alive. Tommy was still alive and Dream had stolen his death- he was always ruining- he always ruined-

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” Sapnap said desperately, and arms were wrapping around him, urging him to his feet. “We’re going to get you out of here, alright? Can you stand?”

Tommy opened his mouth and then closed it. He was shaking, and pain was distant. “My crutches,” he mumbled faintly. “Dream has them in his room.”

“Oh, your leg is still...?” Sapnap grimaced. “Right. I’ll... I’ll carry you for now, alright? Then I’ll- I’ll go get your crutches later. Just- Just not right now. I can’t go in there right now.”

Tommy didn’t say anything, feeling like time was skipping from one moment to the next. George helped maneuver Tommy onto Sapnap’s back, and he was warm. Burning against Tommy as he wrapped his hands around Sapnap’s neck, tired and desperate and confused, his head pressed to Sapnap’s shoulder. “Don’t- Don’t look, okay? It’s not pretty, I promise you. I’m going to get you outside.”

Tommy nodded, but as they left the room, he still looked. Dream wasn’t around to punish him for it anyway.

The instant they stepped into the hall Tommy could see the blood. Sapnap moved quickly, but Tommy still noted it all. When they passed by Dream’s bedroom... well, that was the worst of it. Even just a quick glimpse showed so much red—on the walls and ceiling and floor, just puddles of it. Drag marks of blood led out of the bedroom and to the stairs, dripping down in pools as Sapnap took the steps two at a time. Then they were at the front door, and Tommy craned his head to see the blood trail turn away to the back door, which was wide open, showing the yard and the forest beyond.

Suddenly, the wet squelching that had accompanied the footsteps last night made so much more sense.

“Almost there,” Sapnap breathed, strained, and the next moment they were out the front door and Tommy was blinking in the harsh sunlight, his eyes watering.

The neighbourhood was stretched out before him and- and nothing had changed. He blinked, because he hadn’t seen it in months, and yet it was just like his memories. Different cars were

parked out front, and when he looked, he realized that Bad and Skeppy were standing on the lawn, the former pacing before perking up when they showed.

“Was Dream in there?” Bad breathed, but George was already there to shake his head. “I- I called in the incident but the hunters aren’t here yet and they don’t want people searching the forest so- oh. Oh is that... Tommy?”

Tommy blinked at Bad, but didn’t say anything. It was sort of surreal to be seeing people again after so long with Dream. Next thing, Sapnap was carefully crouching down and depositing Tommy on the curbside. It was only then that Tommy really realized what a sight he must be. Exhausted, hair a mess, covered in flower petals and wearing pajamas that should probably be washed.

“We found him locked in the study.” Sapnap was speaking quietly, but Tommy overheard anyway. “We think Dream did it to protect him. There was- was blood on the door, but it looked like whatever broke into the house couldn’t get into that room.”

“...And Dream?”

“I don’t- let’s not discuss it here. It’s- It’s not good, though.”

And Tommy tuned them out.

It was cold outside, he realized. It was early in the morning and it wasn’t warm yet. The concrete was icy beneath him, and he curled up a bit more, but didn’t bother moving. It hurt to breathe, the air stinging the little space left in his lungs.

Inevitably, he started coughing again, and thought it a miracle he hadn’t had a fit sooner. The motions hurt, and he could feel the way the sharp ache pierced every rib and muscle with each spasm. The petals were thorns that cut his throat as they reached his mouth and were spat out onto the curbside.

He was just wiping the blood from his mouth when he jolted as something brushed his back. He twisted to find Bad lowering a coat onto him, a gentle smile on the stranger’s face. “Oh Tommy,” he said softly, but he wasn’t looking at Tommy, just the petals. That was alright. Tommy was basically all petals by this point anyway. “It’s going to be alright. We’re- We’re here for you. It’ll be alright.”

The words were senseless, and Tommy let them flow through him. He couldn’t- nothing really meant much to him right now. He wasn’t dead and he couldn’t really process that. Dream was probably dead, because of Tommy, and he didn’t process that either. He just sort of sat on the curb and marveled at how clear the birdsong was out here, and how fresh the air.

It was unfortunate that more people were gathering now.

Some neighbours were clustering, keeping their distance at the insistence of Dream’s friends, and no one drew close to Tommy. Eventually a patrol car arrived, but it didn’t appear the officer would do much more than spread some yellow tape around.



The only good thing to come of this was that eventually Sapnap came over to them, and he was carrying Tommy's crutches. He set them carefully on the curb, and then crouched in front of Tommy. "We're going to leave soon, alright?" he said softly. "Bad has space in his house for you to stay, at least until we figure something else out. Is there anything you want me to get from the house before we leave?"

Tommy blinked at him, digesting information at a snail's pace. He didn't have much, but he was still dressed in his pajamas and while keeping himself clean was too much effort most days, he figured he should at least have the option of getting changed. "There's some clothes in my dresser," he mumbled, and had to pause to cough again. The tickling in his throat had been near relentless since waking up, no matter how much he tried to force it to the background. His voice fucking hurt, and more petals were not helping.

"Okay," Sapnap said easily. "Is there anything else? Um, is there, uh, medicine? For your condition?"

There was. Tommy had gotten some during his trip to the hospital, but Dream had gotten rid of it shortly after. Maybe hid it somewhere, maybe threw it away, but it probably wasn't worth Tommy's time. The inhaler would only delay his death anyway, and Tommy was starting to get pretty eager to just get dying off his checklist already.

Tommy shook his head.

Sapnap went to get clothes, and Bad was back, alongside Skeppy. Tommy was helped to his feet, although this all still felt a bit distant and weird, and for a moment he just marveled at the unfamiliar press of the crutches under his arms, at how he could hold himself now.

Then...

"Tommy!"

His name sure was being said a lot. Tommy flinched a bit, turning dully to see what someone wanted with him now, and blinked. He really should have known that voice, but it'd been so long, he didn't- But there he was.

Tubbo.

Schlatt was right behind Tubbo, and they both somehow managed to make it past the gawkers and the unsteady perimeter, and Tubbo's eyes were deadset on Tommy.

Tommy blinked, trying to remember it all, trying to figure out where they stood. Things were distant, but a part of Tommy came slamming back, and found that when he looked at Tubbo, there were a few emotions that arose. Distantly, a longing and affection. Closer was sharp irritation, fear, confusion, anger. Smothering it all was an ever present apathy, because Tommy had already done this song and dance before, and he was done with it.

Tubbo was the first real friend that Tommy ever had in his life. They met two years ago when Tommy moved here after getting adopted by Dream. For the longest time they were simply

inseparable, getting into more trouble than they knew what to do with. When days with Dream were... difficult, then Tommy could always rely on Tubbo to be there for him.

Things changed though.

Tubbo found someone else to grow closer with, while he grew farther with Tommy. Tommy's illness hadn't helped. It showed that Tubbo didn't really care about him, and like hell Tommy wanted to appear weak in front of Tubbo. He started keeping more and more distance, the resentment growing, and with it the frequency of the coughing fits. Their last interaction had been yet another fight, and then the incident happened, and Tommy hadn't seen Tubbo since. Tommy had been trapped in that godforsaken house for months, and Tubbo had never once visited. At that point, Tommy probably deserved it.

Seeing Tubbo now was like seeing a ghost Tommy had long thought moved on. A specter of a person, standing as perfect as his memories of him, eyes wide and mouth agape and attention on nothing at all except Tommy.

"Tommy!" Tubbo called again, elbowing past Sapnap who tried to stop him. "Fuck, let me go! Tommy, are you alright? What happened? Where's Dream, why are you on crutches, are you all...?"

He stopped, but Tommy couldn't listen anyway. He didn't care much about Tubbo anymore, didn't feel much, but the flowers had different ideas. The instant Tubbo had come into view, they started scratching at his lungs until he succumbed. The coughs were harsh and painful, Bad's hand on his shoulder bracing him to keep him from falling.

The fit left him exhausted and shaky, and he turned from the blood and petals on his palm to look at Tubbo. Tubbo, who was staring back unmoving with something maybe akin to horror.

Tommy took back what he said earlier. Tubbo wasn't the ghost. Tommy was the ghost. It was obvious in how everyone stared at him, at the double looks he received, like no one was quite believing that he was alive and here.

The fact that he looked akin to a ghost didn't help either. Tommy routinely avoided looking in mirrors anymore, but he still knew what he looked like. Dark eye bags from a lack of actual sleep, hollow cheeks from eating too little, and ragged hair that hadn't been properly washed or cut in too long. Tommy was an actual ghost, a deadman walking, and at some point he just wanted to pass on.

He gave Tubbo one last long look, found that he couldn't even find the resentment anymore, and chose to speak to him one last time, his throat raw and raspy. "A monster got in the house," he said simply, and then turned to look at Bad. "Can we go now?"

Maybe there was a part of him that still felt something, because he knew that he needed to get away. That he couldn't stand being looked at for one second more, so when he eased himself into Bad's car, he finally felt himself go limp.

Bad was driving, and Skeppy got into the front too. Everyone kept shooting him looks, but Tommy didn't respond anymore.

Idly, he stared out the window as they started moving. He could see Dream's house from the outside for the first time in a long time. It was skeletal. The upstairs window in the study could be seen, curtains closed with plywood behind them. There was the porch roof directly below, which Tommy had fallen off months ago. There was the forest, spread out behind. It grew farther, and with it, the monsters.

Tommy thought of the locked study door, the shuffling thing beyond it, and knew that there would always be something in his way.

Dream's house grew smaller and smaller, the forest farther and farther. And Tubbo. Tubbo stood on the curb watching until they turned out of view, Schlatt's hand on his shoulder.

Tommy stared back, and once more they made eye contact.

Tubbo's eyes were wide and green and panicked. He reached out, as if he could touch Tommy. Then he pulled his hand back, his eyes narrowed a bit, mouth set, and gave a stiff, brief nod.

Tommy had no idea what that meant.

Then Tubbo was gone.

## Chapter End Notes

Tubbo, nodding at Tommy: he'll know what this means  
Tommy, being nodded at: I have no idea what that means

Was reading the comments and realized I probably could have kept Tommy locked in that room for a lot longer and milked it for angst, but to be fair it has been a full day and we have other, more fucked up things to get to. Good luck.

# The Window Reflected My Future Back at Me

## Chapter Summary

Tommy gains access to a window.

## Chapter Notes

Updates are going to slow down now, since this chapter is officially the last of my old chapter backlog written before this story was posted, back when I was like 'oh, I'm never going to post this, no one will see it, I can be as weird and unhinged as I want'. Anyway, so that plan worked great. Anything past this point is the new chapter backlog, still weird and unhinged, but written after the fic was posted, and will likely update weekly with maybe some biweekly updates thrown in for variety.

Honestly I'm pretty excited for what's to come.

## Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, body horror, it/its pronouns used in a dehumanizing way, dehumanization, choking, suffocation, injury, forced treatment

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bad and Skeppy's house wasn't near the forest.

That was the first fact that Tommy registered, dully, in the back of his mind as he got out of the car. It was hard to think much else, with time slipping by in skips and halts, the sting of his knuckles from where he'd desperately banged against the door keeping him stuck thoroughly in that night.

His nails were chipped from pulling at the plywood, hands speckled with bits of splinters and one hand wrapped in bloody crumbling bandages hiding the glass cuts. He still smelled blood, even when he was outside, Bad hovering anxiously by him as carefully he gripped his crutches and pulled himself forward.

The house was two floors and painted a pale blue. When Tommy got inside, the first of these facts was thoroughly acknowledged as he stared at the staircase in front of him.

“Guest bedroom is on this floor,” Bad said helpfully, and thank fuck for small miracles. And here, Tommy should clarify, the thankfulness was for more than just the convenience of not having to go up and down the stairs, but also the convenience of escape. Historically, he didn’t have a great record with climbing out second floor windows, but he had a fantastic record of escaping out ones on ground level. Suffice to say, Tommy knew from the moment that he saw the forest disappear in the rearview mirror that he would not be staying in this house long.

It didn’t exactly take long to get settled. The bedroom was a bit more furnished than the one that Tommy was used to, but fundamentally it was the same, although this one had photographs and art on the walls. Sapnap came by with the clothes he’d found in Tommy’s room, but there wasn’t enough to fill much of the dresser.

Each time someone came in, Tommy found himself avoiding looking at them. They all had the same expression, same sadness and pity in their eyes when they saw him. Tommy almost preferred Dream. Almost, and... and thoughts of Dream weren’t great right now.

He declined lunch, when it was offered, his appetite gone and stomach tight and uncomfortable. Instead he spent the rest of the morning and afternoon sitting in bed, a book taken from his old room sitting on his lap. Sometimes he read. Other times he stared at the wall and didn’t see much of anything. Bad offered on multiple occasions to move a television into the room, but Tommy kept declining. Even if he had the option he doubted he’d turn it on, and he’d already decided he wouldn’t be here long enough to watch anything worthwhile.

Still, his decision wasn’t cemented until supper, when Bad and Skeppy both came in, and it only took a glance to see their expressions. Tommy resolved himself to staring out the window instead.

“Hey,” Bad said carefully, taking a seat on the edge of the bed, a plate of food put aside for now. Skeppy decided to stay leaning against the wall. “We wanted to give you space, but... we also want to talk about what’s going to happen next.”

“Alright,” Tommy mumbled, his voice thin and quiet, and he winced at how painful it was to speak. He had to cough, but thankfully it was only twice, although it was near agony as petals fluttered from his lips. Bad watched them float down.

“We’re happy to have you here,” Bad began, and Tommy knew what would be said next. He’d gotten this speech while in foster care enough times for him to know the drill. “Of course we are, but... But you’re not doing well Tommy, and we’re worried, and we’re not sure we can help you, or provide enough care. Not like Dream could. But- but you’re alright to stay here for now, we’re not- We’re going to have you see a doctor tomorrow, to assess the situation. A-And a social worker will be coming as well, and we’re all- we’re all going to figure out what’s best for you. If you do need more care, then we’ll make it happen. We’re going to do everything we can for you, Tommy.”

Tommy listened to him absently without taking many of the words in. They were getting rid of him. They didn’t want to care for him. That was fine. Tommy knew that already, he didn’t need the itchiness in his lungs to tell him that.

He also knew that he wouldn't be going back into the foster system. Mostly because he wouldn't survive much longer there. He probably wouldn't survive much longer, period. A hospital would also be worse, the same room all over again, but with strangers who wouldn't even pretend to love or care for him.

That's why Tommy would be leaving before any of that could happen. He didn't know how far he would get, he just knew that he wasn't dying in a fucking bed.

He nodded though, when Bad hashed out more details. Tried to pretend to pay attention when Skeppy had something to add. The two eventually got bored of him and left, closing the door behind them, leaving Tommy alone with food that had gone cold.

Tommy did manage a few bites, forcing it down, tasting like blood and ash in his mouth. He needed the strength, for just a bit longer. He'd already been down this road, but hopefully the second time was the charm. Tommy had no intention of being alive come morning.

The evening was slow to drag by, the light getting darker and darker outside his window until the streetlights turned on. Eventually, he heard the other people in the house retire upstairs, until there were no more creaks of the floorboards and he could hear someone snoring, loudly.

Tommy gave it one more hour, like he had with Dream, using each wheezing breath to measure a second.

When enough time had passed, he carefully peeled back the covers, his bare feet touching carpet softer than in his room with Dream. His crutches had been left by his bed, which Tommy had been suspicious of at first, sure that they'd be taken away at any moment, so that he wouldn't 'hurt himself' wandering the house. But that was probably just a Dream thing, he realized.

The window was close and easy to open. The screen was simple enough to take out. However, he found himself stopping with his arms braced on the sill. He'd unlocked the window from the inside. He wouldn't be able to lock it again when he was out. That meant that Bad and Skeppy's house would be vulnerable, would be open to whatever creeping thing in the forest decided to wander a little deeper into town.

Maybe that wouldn't happen. Maybe they'd be fine and safe and Tommy was just wasting time. Then again, maybe the monster could have killed Tommy last night. Maybe Dream could have lived instead.

Tommy decided, shutting and latching the window again, that he was done with maybes. He was done with people dying in his place. If one more fucking person got murdered before he did, than he was going to strangle those eldritch creatures himself.

He eased himself back across the room, the crutches making the journey easier and simpler, although his arms shook a bit from a previous lack of use, his cut palm stinging uncomfortably. He cracked open the door out of his room, waited long enough to see that the rest of the house was still and dark, then left. There was a bowl of keys by the front door. Tommy found the one for the house, and then opened the door outside. The night air was cold

and crisp. His bare feet touched concrete, and Tommy found himself longing for the shoes he used to have, which he was pretty sure Dream had thrown away at some point, because he hadn't seen any sign of them for months.

He turned back to the door, to the warm, cozy, sleeping house. Dream's friends had remained blissfully unaware of Tommy until now. Bad and Skeppy wouldn't miss him. They'd forget about him soon enough.

Tommy pulled the door closed and slipped the key in to lock it. He then stooped down, shoving the key back inside through the mail slot. That was done, then. Tommy was locked out of the house, and he doubted any of its residents would be dumb enough to respond to suspicious knocking in the middle of the night after their friend was taken.

He pictured what they'd find come morning: an empty bed, some flower petals, missing crutches, and a key sitting in the middle of the floor.

Tommy tried not to overthink it. He just hefted his crutches up beneath his arms and focused on moving. One swing after another, until he was off across their lawn, grass weird and soft on his feet, and down the sidewalk, past the block and then further.

Dark houses went by, curtains drawn over every window. Sometimes a porch light would turn on as he passed, but no one ever looked outside. It was quiet to an unsettling degree, like the set up to a horror movie, but in this case Tommy was actively trying to be the victim. Every step he didn't want to take just meant he was closer to getting killed by something that wasn't Dream.

Not that Dream could kill him anymore.

Time passed in the same way it did when Tommy was staring at the walls. Sometimes he'd blink, and the houses around him would have long changed, and he'd be farther than he was, throat burning and lungs aching, arms and legs sore from so much walking after months of disuse. The forest was a constant background, slowly growing closer and closer, as Tommy vaguely remembered how to get from Bad's house back to his own, from the rare visit back when Dream had let him leave the house and go with him to places.

Even with how quiet it was, Tommy still couldn't hear the singing, and somehow the lack of compulsion urging him to enter the forest just made Tommy all that more desperate to get to the treeline.

Sometimes he'd stop, hacking up lungs, but those breaks weren't as frequent as they should have been. Dried blood stained his chin, flower petals tickling his lips, a constant reminder of why he was doing this. Forced to keep his breathing shallow, despite how much he felt he didn't have enough oxygen, the world sometimes going a bit fuzzy as he pushed himself to keep walking, bare feet scraping against the sidewalk.

By some miracle, he was at Dream's house again. Police tape was set up in a perimeter, the front door left open, and through it Tommy could see the back door was also open, and he could see the dried blood in drag marks on the floor.

Tommy bypassed the house entirely, feeling sick, but he sort of always felt sick.

He went around the side, feet relieved at the grass, even as he stepped on something sharper every now and then, and he could barely even feel his trembling arms as he unlatched the gate to get into the back garden.

He was disappointed to find no strangers waiting at the back door, the yard silent except for a faint backdrop of crickets. The porch light automatically turned on at his approach. Apparently Dream had fixed the light before his death. All it did was illuminate the dried blood on the flagstones and the gate leading to the forest. Tommy swallowed, turning to see blood on the handle of the backdoor as well. Then he saw something else.

Tommy looked up at the movement in his peripheral, and stared up at the side of the house, where there was very clearly a silhouette sitting crouched on the window sill of his bedroom, a faint tapping on the glass now distinguishable.

That was- That was fucking Wilbur.

Tommy just stood there for a moment longer, staring, thoughts flooding through his mind, before the only thing that came out of his mouth was, "What the fuck are you doing?"

He wasn't able to speak loud, but his voice carried, and Wilbur jolted back, awkward gangly limbs nearly causing it to lose its balance, sharp talons scraping into the siding for support. Human eyes flashed Tommy's way, a multitude of expressions stuttering across its face, mostly hidden in shadow.

"Tommy?" Wilbur asked, looking stupid as fuck clinging to the side of the house, especially when the back door was literally right there, wide open.

"No shit," Tommy hissed, each word scraping his throat. "Why the fuck are you at my bedroom?"

"I just- I wanted to-" Then Wilbur composed itself somewhat, drawing its legs more comfortably underneath itself. "I was just checking to see if- if you'd died." *I think I wanted to talk to you again*, the second voice murmured in Tommy's mind. Cool, so that was still a thing.

"Well I fucking didn't," Tommy replied flatly. "I thought you said I'd be dead for sure, that we wouldn't be seeing each other again."

"I- You should be." Wilbur's voice was weird. A bit too soft and weak, unsure. Tommy made a face.

The creature at his window then decided to grace Tommy with its presence, as it carefully picked its way down the side of the house, landing on the lawn with no noise. As it did, the porchlight broke with a loud snap, glass raining down a few feet from Tommy. Fucking wonderful. Now it was dark as balls.

"Thanks, asshat," Tommy said, but didn't bother shying away from the thing in the shadows.



“How did you survive?” Wilbur asked, ignoring him, and instead crept a bit closer, long body thin in the moonlight, too full of holes to be alive, eyes so human that Tommy could almost find them safe, if they weren’t attached to a complete bitch. “Techno should have killed you.” *I think I made a mistake, telling him to kill you.*

“Well obviously it didn’t,” Tommy retorted. “Techno’s the one with the big hat ‘n veil, right? The weird one that knocks or whatever.”

Wilbur blinked. “Uh, no, that’s Phil. Techno’s the one drenched in blood, can’t miss him.”

Tommy was still reeling from the revelation that the stranger with the face that Tommy couldn’t picture without having a panic attack was named Phil, but he tried to push on. “Just how many of you fucks are there? Are all of them as bad at murdering as you?”

“It’s just us,” Wilbur said, a bit of a weird hiss entering its voice, shoulders hunching up. “And we’re not- We’re not bad at murdering, you gremlin. We each just like to hunt in a different way, and Techno- Techno hunts very fucking thoroughly.” *He came back covered in fresh blood, I smelled his kill, I listened to him take it apart.* “If it wasn’t- If he didn’t kill you, then who did he kill, and how did you escape?”

Tommy stilled, and the air seemed to clog in his lungs. He could feel the flowers reach up, nagging him, letting that news of what happened to Dream seep into his brain and fertilize them. It was all- It was all Tommy’s fault, and worst of all was that he only felt envious. He felt fucking cheated. The flowers rose up, a coughing fit started, and when it finished the flagstones had globs of petals on them.

“M-My guardian,” Tommy managed, fists tight with a web of emotion he couldn’t and would never pick apart or comprehend. He instead shoved it into a mental box with all the other bad shit that had happened in his life, and focused on the now and trying to get this fuck to kill him again, although that was probably a fruitless venture. “I got- I got fuck’n, locked in a room or whatever, cause he found out I’d been opening my window. Your friend apparently can’t break down doors. So. I lived. Now I’m here, and I’m...” Tommy swallowed, hands still on his crutches. “I’m ready to go into the forest with you.”

Wilbur blinked at him, and didn’t say anything for a moment. “You want to walk with me into the forest?”

“Yeah, whatever, don’t have many other options cause I’m assuming you’re not going to stab me,” Tommy muttered. Consciously, he wiped the blood from his chin, and hefted his crutches under his shoulders again.

Then Wilbur was crouching in front of him. “Tommy, I’m not going to ask you to walk with me.” *I don’t want to kill you.*

Tommy took a moment, then the anger rose hot and fast past the apathy, with panic and a sort of despaired acceptance right beneath. “The FUCK? Last time I talked to you, you wouldn’t shut up about how you wanted me to come into the forest with you so you could kill me. I’m fucking here, I’m outside, I have my crutches, let’s do this!”

“I don’t want to anymore,” Wilbur told him simply.

Yeah alright fuck this. Tommy shouldered past the eldritch creature, ignoring the prick of the plants under his bare feet as he made his way to the back gate and the forest beyond.

“Wait, where are you going?”

“To get myself killed, bitch,” Tommy yelled back without turning, holding up a hand to flip Wilbur off over his shoulder.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Wilbur commanded, but Tommy was done listening to him. He heard the heavy boots trod after him, squelching from the globs of mud stuck to them, although it hadn’t rained in a while and the ground was dry, so Tommy had no idea how the eldritch abomination had accomplished that. “Where are you even going to go?”

“I don’t care,” Tommy said. “Away from here. Away from everyone. Away from *you*.”

“Me?” Wilbur protested, but Tommy couldn’t find it in himself to care about Wilbur anymore.

His arms and legs were shaking from exertion, and when another coughing fit came, Tommy didn’t even bother stopping, just struggled through it with shallow breaths, his vision flickering dark at the edges when he had a particularly rough bout of hacking.

The trees swallowed them, Wilbur still following (ever a bitch), never touching Tommy and as a result, was unsuccessful in getting him to stop. The ground was sharp and uncomfortable against his bare feet, and Tommy could feel cuts burning, but didn’t slow.

At some point, when he looked back over his shoulder briefly, he couldn’t see any of the houses of the town. It was just forest all around him, and the thin animal trail he’d been following. His pajamas were cut and torn from the undergrowth, his crutches slipping and stumbling on unseen stones, but Tommy refused to stop.

Refused, up until a new sound arose, Wilbur having gone silent, and Tommy jerked to a stop, looking up as something heavy dropped down through the foliage of the trees, nothing but a shadow in the darkness underneath. Then the figure straightened, and Tommy was looking at a man. Shorter than Wilbur, with a long coat that trailed behind it, a veil lining a wide-brimmed hat hiding its face, and wings that were more like mangled wires that drew inwards in awkward angles, vanishing against its clothes. Ah. The bitch from three nights ago.

“Evening,” Tommy greeted the weirdo, and now that he’d stopped moving, Tommy sort of realized he didn’t know if he could start again. His limbs all felt heavy, his head staticky, and his eyes were drooping, lips wet with blood and gentle wheezing.

The newcomer glanced at him, looking him up and down, before turning to Wilbur. “Is this your prey, or...?”

“Fuck you I’m no one’s prey,” Tommy snapped, annoyed about being ignored, but also regretting the roughness of his words and how much they hurt his throat. He glared at the

figure, before spontaneously remembering its name. “*Phil.*”

Phil just laughed, folding its arms into its sleeves. “Who let this rude sassy child into the woods?”

Tommy flipped it off, but then Wilbur was speaking. “Phil, this is Tommy,” it said amicably. “The one I was telling you about the other night, who wasn’t enthralled? Apparently he didn’t get killed by Techno after all, and now he’s here!”

“Okay,” Phil said, peering at Tommy again with new interest. Prick. “Why is he here then?”

“I’m trying to get fucking murdered,” Tommy snapped, ignoring the goosebumps along his arms, too irritated at how thin and reedy his voice was, nearly gone. “But apparently all of you fucks are bad at your jobs.”

“I mean, I can probably help you there, mate, but I don’t think you’d like it very much,” Phil offered. *I might drag you into the sky, sink my talons in, then let you drop to see the shape you make. I might pierce you with wires, string you up, let metal shape you under your skin. I might tear you open, feed you to crows, let them pick out all the best bits while you slowly die.* To Tommy’s surprise, the echo in the back of his mind returned, faint like Wilbur’s had been, but no less the absolute life of the party. He made a face at the options presented, but at least it wasn’t suffocation. Falling and dying on impact sort of sounded nice and quick, actually.

Tommy told Phil as such, and the thing stepped back in surprise, probably not expecting Tommy to accurately guess one of its methods of killing, even though it was obvious as fuck with the wings on its back.

But, before Phil could respond, or better yet, just kill Tommy with no further godawful dialogue, Wilbur stepped in, because of course it did, needing to be a bitch every moment of Tommy’s miserable existence.

“Don’t, Phil,” Wilbur said quickly, eyes on Tommy.

Tommy glared right back. “Why the fuck not-“ But then he’d panicked, and panic brought the flowers, and suddenly Tommy was stumbling back, one of his crutches falling away, and his back was to a tree to support his weight. The fit was hard and heavy, curling up his throat, cutting it raw, blood spluttering from his lips from every cough. The mass of petals was hard to get out, nearly blocking his airway, but Tommy managed it, blinking with dizziness, and somehow found himself sinking to the ground, bark scraping his spine as he half fell and half slid.

“Ow,” he said, clutching his head, or tried to say, but his voice was about gone, nothing more than a harsh whisper. It felt like fucking knives had filled him, and more than that, Tommy could recognize how dead his arms and legs felt, and he realized, distantly, that he wouldn’t be standing up again.

“He’s in pain, mate,” Phil was saying, when Tommy blurrily tuned back in. They were standing over him, forms fuzzy. “I can make it quick for him, like he asked. I know you don’t

like to kill directly-“

“No, you’re not getting me Phil. I think- I don’t-“ Quiet, for a moment. “I don’t really want him to die at all. He’s- He’s fascinating! He’s not scared of me, or enthralled by me, he’s like no human I’ve ever met before. He’s interesting.”

“I know Will, but I’m not sure he’s going to live much longer anyway. That’s late-stage hanahaki. Mercy is probably the best thing you can give him.”

Tommy wanted to speak up, to agree with Phil, to put his two cents in, but he found himself unable to really make a sound. He was just... tired. Exhausted to his fingertips and to his toes, bloody and broken and hurt. Sitting on the ground, on the leaf litter, was actually comfortable. There was the occasional sound of other wildlife, the rustling of leaves, and the sighs of the trees around him. It wasn’t his room. It wasn’t Dream. Fuck it, even suffocating, it would still be a nice enough death so long as he was outside and free for the first time in years.

“But there’s treatment, isn’t there Phil? You’re familiar with it, surely you can do- do something!”

“I... can, but it’s not a permanent solution Will. The treatment I can give him will damage his lungs worse in the long run. I can give him a few more days for sure, maybe a week or two, but that’s it. I can’t cure it.”

“Then- Then let’s do that! That sounds great!”

“...You’re just going to get more attached.”

“I won’t, Phil. It’ll be fine.”

Tommy blinked at that. The words were distant, his anger towards them talking over him having dissipated to apathy and acceptance. It wasn’t surprising. Tommy never had a say in anything. Tommy also had the worst luck in the world, so of course out of all their victims, not only would Tommy be the one they spared, but also the one they actively wanted to keep alive.

They wouldn’t care about him though. Wilbur had already been open about that. Wilbur thought Tommy was interesting, that was it. It didn’t actually care about Tommy beyond some weird fascination that would die soon enough. Tommy was alone, he had no one, and no one would mourn him or notice when he was gone.

Even then, Tommy thought of Tubbo. Of seeing his friend for the first time in months. Wide eyed, surprised, like Tommy was a ghost, like he should have already been dead. Months. Months he’d been gone, sick, and never once had Tubbo ever reached out to him.

Tubbo didn’t care. Dream was dead and gone. These weird eldritch monsters probably didn’t even feel love. Tommy was just.. he had no one. He’d never had anyone.

When the flowers rose up to tickle his throat, he didn't resist, even though it hurt. It was agony, forcing his lungs to contract, to spit out air, to spasm. It was another coughing fit—until it wasn't.

Tommy's eyes went wide, then he was falling forward, arms trembling to keep him above the ground. He couldn't- He couldn't breathe. There was something more solid than the mass of petals filling his throat, blocking air almost entirely, stuck in a painful lump. For a moment, Tommy struggled to fucking cough, vision blackening, until he managed to make some sort of noise.

There were hands on his back, he thought, maybe. Rubbing circles or supporting him or something. It hardly mattered, Tommy's arms giving out, his thin frame trembling, jerking with the severity of the motions. Coughing. Coughing. Coughing. Choking. Can't breathe-

It dislodged.

Something large scraped past his tongue and cheeks, out his mouth, onto the forest floor which was so much closer to his face than he last remembered.

Tommy blinked, half out of it, unable to move besides the very faint, very shallow wheezing in and out, his lungs filled so full of flowers there was little room for air.

There it was in front of him, wet and bloody. An entire allium, bulb and stem and roots, sitting on the ground. An entire flower had been hacked up from his lungs. Tommy looked and blinked slowly, trying to comprehend.

This was... it, then.

Somehow it didn't really register. Months of getting closer to death, of knowing he was going to suffocate, knowing he was going to die but at the same time it could never click completely. Even when he'd unlocked the back door, or let Wilbur in. There was always a slight uncertainty.

At the sight of the flower, of the allium, there was no uncertainty left. Tommy would be dead within a few hours at most.

The last stage of hanahaki was coughing up entire flowers. At that point, the patient would either finally suffocate, lungs filled, or they would choke on the flowers they were coughing up, throat blocked. One or the other would happen, and it would not be long now.

Tommy sort of didn't move anymore.

He sort of just layed there, distantly feeling hands on his person, pulling him up into someone's lap. Talking. Loud, but voices muddled. Uninteresting. Tommy hardly cared whether they would kill him now. He was already a dead man walking.

“—save him!”

“Will-“

“No, I don’t care—“

“—alright, meet me at the house, I’ll—“

The hands, then arms, curled more around him, and Tommy was off the forest floor. He missed it, the leaf litter under his cheek, but he didn’t protest. Instead he was limp like a corpse, dangling in someone’s arms. They were warm, skin sort of clammy, and smelled like a stale lake.

Tommy looked up, saw Wilbur’s face, thought that the last person he’d ever see wasn’t even a person.

Wilbur was looking back, saying something, but Tommy’s ears were ringing. He was tired, very tired.

When Wilbur started walking, taking Tommy somewhere, Tommy felt something through the apathy.

It was fear.

Tommy was dying, and Wilbur was somehow going to stop that from happening. But... he couldn’t succeed, right? There was no real cure, nothing that would magically make this better, no way the monsters had access to a hospital or decent medical care. So the question was, how much pain would Tommy be put through when they tried?

Maybe he could float off before then. Maybe he could just stop breathing, except his coward body kept convulsing in fits, desperate for air when it wouldn’t come. He settled for faint wheezing that flowed in and out, eyes closed, head leaning against a chest that didn’t have a heartbeat, but did breathe steady and strong.

Then Tommy’s eyes flew open, when suddenly his lungs seized up, something blocking them, and he couldn’t breath again and-!

He caught sight of a building through the trees, seconds before he practically threw himself from Wilbur’s grip, managing to tumble onto the ground in time to start heaving and gasping and seizing up, his throat blocked with mounds.

Finally, there was sound and coughing, something dislodging in a mess of pain and blood and flesh scrapped raw, and Tommy spasmed as two alliums were spat out. He promptly collapsed, fingers twitching, his entire body trembling with strain and exhaustion. A hand was rubbing his back again, but he was so disconnected from the moment it took him a second to remember he wasn’t alone.

“Phil—!”

The beat of wings and the creak of metal, and two faint clicks of shoes setting down. The stranger in the veil was back, settling over him, almost like death, its face a human silhouette.

Something plastic was pressed to Tommy’s lips, an inhaler, and then there was the command, “Breathe in.”

Tommy didn't want to. He didn't want medicine. He didn't want things to get better. He just wanted them to be over already. But, he could only hold his breath for so long, before he broke, gasping in a gulp of air and-

Whatever was puffed out was then breathed in as well, and instantly it *burned*.

Not like fire, that would be too easy, but like acid that ate away at the flesh inside his esophagus on its way into his lungs, burning and decaying and corroding deeper and deeper until Tommy was writhing in pain, screaming, fingers desperately clawing at dirt and leaves and anything, until someone unseen caught his wrists to hold him still. His eyes were wide open but he couldn't- couldn't see anything, couldn't be aware.

He was throwing himself to the side again, turning and being released in time for him to start coughing, bringing the medication back up his throat again for it to just burn more. Brittle, dry things were spat out, cutting his burning tongue. Withered alliums, black and brown and decayed, were on the ground in front of him. Roots and stems and all, bits and pieces eaten away by the acid in the air.

Dead plant matter. The flowers had been burned from his lungs.

When Tommy gulped in his next breath of air, there was so much of it, so much space in his lungs that it made him delirious with relief. His first full breath in, expanding his chest, in months.

He was breathing. He was breathing and it was easy and everything hurt so, so much, the tissue in his lungs and throat raw and blistered and corroded.

His eyes slipped shut again and there were hands lifting him up, but he was done this time. Exhaustion and pain clung heavy, until it made his consciousness fade.

The last real thing he remembered seeing was a small cottage nestled in a clearing, smoke coming from the chimney, waiting for strangers to approach.

## Chapter End Notes

Wilbur: it's so tragic that tommy died

Tommy: i'm not dead, pussy!

Wilbur: sometimes I can still hear him calling me a pussy

Anyway, everyone in this fic has A+ communication skills.

# Something Unasked For That's Never Said

## Chapter Summary

Tommy finds himself in a cottage full of monsters.

## Chapter Notes

Welcome back to clown town.

### Warnings

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Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, body horror, mild blood and gore, technically kidnapping, it/its pronouns used in a dehumanizing way, dehumanization, food issues, references to forced treatment

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up slowly, eyes crusted from a deep sleep, already feeling how sore his throat was. When he breathed, it was easy, if not uncomfortable as cool air stung raw and abused flesh.

That alone was enough for Tommy to blink in confusion, sure that this was some sort of dream where everything was okay and Tubbo was still his friend and Dream wasn't bad and he could breathe normally without his lungs bursting with flowers.

It would be so nice, except this room wasn't one that Tommy had ever been in before. There was the faint smell of fresh bread and sweet flowers, the latter of which made Tommy want to gag, and when he sat up, he found there was an open window beside him letting in crisp birdsong and a faint buzzing. Were there bees? Tommy hadn't seen bees in a long time.

Looking outside revealed, indeed, a bee meandering by, and Tommy tried to give it the appropriate awe. Far below, there was some sort of garden stretching outwards until it hit a crumbling stone wall, dividing it from the forest that covered the horizon beyond.

Apparently, he was in some sort of attic, tucked into a bed with layers of blankets. Chests and boxes of things littered the room with a trapdoor as the only obvious exit. The roof was low and slanted into a peak overhead, so that Tommy would only be able to stand up straight in



the middle of the room and have to duck the rest of the time. He made note not to bang his head when he got out of bed.

The first thing he noticed when he swung his legs over the edge was that his right leg absolutely hated that movement, giving a sharp, jagged pain that made Tommy clench his teeth. It was pulsing with an ache from being used too much, and by this point Tommy had already put together his memories of what he assumed was just last night. The only thing that wasn't adding up was the fact that this attic was far too nice for a house that belonged to monsters. But then he remembered the cottage he'd glimpsed at before he'd passed out, and wondered if this was all just another lure the monsters used to find humans to feast on.

That would also be too easy. Because Tommy was still fucking alive, and he was trying to wander into every trap these bastards had, yet they still refused to kill him.

He rubbed his throat, grimacing, and found that the idea of talking or opening his mouth was just wholly unappealing. He'd been fostered by a few houses that had gotten him inhalers for his hanahaki before, but that medication was tame. It burned a bit, generally more of a discomfort than any actual pain. The medicine was designed to burn away a bit of the petals and leaves in hanahaki-ridden lungs, countering some of the growth without causing damage to the surrounding tissue as a way to slow down and manage the disease. Usually, his inhaler would get lost or broken at the next house anyway, so he'd never really depended on the medication before. Dream had already tossed the inhaler the hospital gave him first chance.

Whatever he'd been giving last night was like that medication on steroids. A larger, more concentrated dose that had eviscerated everything in its path, burning flowers and lungs alike, strong and damaging. It made Tommy sort of understand what Phil meant when it said this medication was temporary, that it would eat away his lungs more than the flowers if they weren't careful. Fuck Phil, and fuck that medication. That fucking sucked.

Worse, he could still feel the slight pull of roots when he breathed too deep, and the slight fluttering of stray petals which let him know that hanahaki was more stubborn than he'd like. Subdued, but not gone.

When he moved to brace himself on the bed and stand, he found that his day had not improved. His fingers had been meticulously cleaned of splinters, the dried blood gone from under his nails, and his glass-shredded palm wrapped in new bandages, pulsing dully. The soles of his feet had also been wrapped, faint pain giving away the stinging cuts and blisters from his vaguely remembered march across the town and into the forest.

Tommy pulled himself up to his feet with a scowl regardless, hands flying to the wall and low ceiling to steady himself, and he made it his mission to limp over to the trapdoor and open it, finding a ladder waiting for him.

Fuck this place.

Tommy stared at the ladder, then twisted to look back at the open window. He weighed his options, and then finally went with the ladder.

Getting down was a slow, arduous process, as he was only able to use his left leg and had to support his body weight with his arms. His muscles were worn and tired from the exertion the day before, and they trembled with the strain he put on them now. Tommy could care less. He was done with this house, he was done with these monsters, and he wanted to be outside again.

Downstairs was even more homey, if that was possible. The ladder led directly to an open kitchen and living room, that had cozy chairs for reading in and old appliances and a wood stove. Exposed beams lined the ceiling, and frilled curtains let in warm light. Across the room was a door that looked like it might lead outside. There was also a short hall leading to a few closed rooms, and tucked into one corner was another trapdoor likely leading to a basement.

Tommy eyed the front door, but he didn't think he could stumble there without support, so he began to make his way around the perimeter of the space so he could use the wall to lean on. He ended up scooting past the trapdoor, and was just a bit beyond it when suddenly there was movement. From the trapdoor.

He turned in time to see the wooden slab get pushed open, the abrupt smell of blood thick and pungent enough to shock his senses.

The thing that rose up was more of a monster than the other two could ever hope to be. It was hulking, towering almost to the ceiling, causing it to hunch over slightly. Broad beneath layers and layers of clothes matted with blood to the point the original colours were indistinguishable. A boar skull, likely freshly killed as it hadn't yet been cleaned of the strings of flesh and muscle clinging to the bone, covered the monster's face. Flies buzzed up, lured by the way this thing smelled of rotting, putrid meat.

It climbed the ladder in stiff, solid movements, and its feet hit the wooden floor boards, the steps shuffling and squelching, and so, so familiar. *Fsssh thump*. Oh. It was the thing that had entered his house a day ago. That lumbered uncontested. That brought the scent of blood.

It stopped before Tommy, a towering, awful shape.

They must have made quite the scene. A scrawny teenager being loomed over by a massive, boar-headed murder beast, in the quaint living room of a homey cottage with sunshine and birdsong coming in through the windows.

It stared at Tommy, head tilted down, actual eyes and visage unseen beyond the raw meat that sloughed off the skull, and said nothing.

Tommy, also not interested in talking, although for entirely different reasons, found that for once his body wasn't frozen on him. It was so surreal, almost like a dream, and his actions felt so fluid and disconnected as he reached forward unprompted, and sunk his fingers into the blood soaked sleeve of the monster, grimacing at the texture.

The beast stiffened noticeably, head tilting to watch Tommy's hand.

Tommy carefully pulled on the sleeve, finding no resistance, and raised it up towards himself. He balanced on his left leg, using his other arm to take hold of the beast's hand—impossibly large and broad with thick fingers ending in curled, jagged claws—and guided it to his throat, until he felt his neck pulse beneath the weight of a hand that could easily snap his spine in two. Then, he waited to be killed.

“No.”

That was all the thing said, and when Tommy's grip loosened in surprise at the rumbling deep voice, the monster pulled its arm free and returned it to its side beneath layers of fabric again.

The blood that was on Tommy's throat and hands now felt itchy and uncomfortable, and he scowled. He reached forward, and the beast tried to take a step back, but Tommy was quicker. He snatched up the sleeve of the arm again, and as soon as he did, the monster stiffened up and stopped moving once more, as if somehow it wouldn't be easily able to break out of Tommy's hold and smack him to the side and break all his bones.

Tommy used both hands to curl the monstrous fingers around his throat this time, holding them there, and glared at the beast. It stared back.

“No,” it said again.

Tommy didn't move, and didn't let go.

Apparently this was too much for the creature to take. “I would,” it said, easy and not regretting. *I want to. I want to split you open. I want to know what your lungs look like. They said they were full of plants. I wonder what they taste like. I wonder if I could make tea out of them.* “But Wilbur wants you alive, which means Phil wants you alive. Thus, you'll remain alive.”

Alright, the tea thing was weird, but Tommy was having a harder time coming to terms with the fact that he was starting to suspect the monster which had invaded his home and filled his nightmares might actually be a giant fucking pushover. It was obvious it didn't want Tommy to touch it and it didn't want to stand here, yet it wouldn't move away, like it couldn't break out of Tommy's grip.

That meant they were at a stalemate, Tommy trying to ignore the squishy feeling of blood soaked fabric beneath his fingers. He, very carefully, did let go with one hand, in order to give the monster a very well deserved middle finger.

Then, the door behind him opened, and Tommy twisted to see a figure duck inside with a click click, light and airy with a veil settling around the silhouette of a head. His surprise was enough for his grip to loosen, and the beast, who if Tommy remembered right was named Techno, was quick to pull its arm back, putting an extra step of space between them for good measure.

“What's going on here?” the thing named Phil said, stopping as it entered the room. It actually looked like it belonged here, in daylight in this cozy cottage, with its loose and flowy robes and its elegant veil and its vague unsettling vibes and metal threads and meat hidden

underneath. It looked more like the type of creature to lure in its prey by welcoming it into a too-nice home and then stringing them up with wires.

“Nothing,” Techno replied gruffly, unmoving, and Phil stared at it for a moment.

“Mate, why aren’t you changed out of your work clothes?” it asked, clearly confused.

“You’re getting blood on your floors. I thought you hated that. Warps the wood or something.”

Tommy whipped his head around to stare at Techno, who straightened a miniscule amount and shifted its weight. “...I didn’t feel like it.”

“Didn’t feel like it,” Phil echoed, sounding baffled. “Well, that’s a first. Don’t suppose you’ll let the rest of us trail blood in here anytime soon.”

“Never,” Techno snapped, cutting it off. Its mask turned briefly to Tommy for a moment, then it turned around entirely, crouching to move back down the ladder into what was likely the basement. “I’m going to get changed. Because I feel like it now.”

“...Alright,” Phil said uncertainly, and it and Tommy both watched the hulking beast retreat downwards at what one might say was a hasty pace, the trapdoor snapping shut overhead with a loud bang. “Weird,” Phil muttered, then it looked to Tommy, and tilted its head in an inviting gesture. “I’m glad to see you’re up. How are you feeling?”

Tommy, still having no desire to talk and frankly wanting to deal with the asshole in the basement rather than this fake-nice and cloying asshole, raised both middle fingers in response.

The monster just chuckled lightly, moving easily into the room almost like it was floating, drifting into the kitchen and pulling out a pot and setting it on the stove along with a kettle of water. Tommy, warily, watched it from across the room, using the wall to hold himself steady again, right foot scarcely touching the floor.

“I’ll get you some tea and soup for lunch,” Phil chattered idly. “That should be gentle on your throat, hopefully. Probably should only give you soft foods for a bit. From what I understand, you’re throat will be pretty raw for awhile, but it should get better in a few days. Do you want to come sit down?”

Tommy, frankly, would rather leave, but he highly doubted he could get to the door before this asshole would catch him, and the weird veiled creature gave off you-can’t-leave vibes strong enough for Tommy not to bother trying.

Instead he resigned himself to slowly backtracking, limping along with the walls as support until he had to make a stumbling dash for the table, falling against it to avoid collapsing on the floor as his right leg shook and trembled. He wasn’t exactly thrilled when he looked up to find Phil watching, the shape of its hat giving away what direction it was facing.

“Is your leg hurt?” it said, asking the obvious.

Tommy once again used two middle fingers as his answer.

Phil just hummed, and turned back to the vegetables it was chopping. “Well, if you want it looked at, you should bring it up with Wilbur. He only wanted me to help with the hanahaki, so anything beyond that I’ll leave to him.”

Tommy absolutely would not bring it up, and instead chose to sit down at their table, which was designed like a picnic bench. It even had a red checkered table cloth on it.

Besides, he thought idly, what would they do about it? He’d already had his leg set in an actual hospital, although admittedly Dream had forced the cast off earlier than it should have been. It didn’t matter. He was done having his bone broken. It was fine the way it was.

He sat there for awhile, watching Phil put together a soup with expert precision, knife quick and practiced as it cubed vegetables and meat, letting them simmer in the pot. Eventually, the trapdoor in the corner of the room opened again, and the beast who was named Techno for some fucking reason emerged.

Tommy actually had to do a double take.

The blood was gone, and when the trapdoor closed, so was the smell. Techno’s boar skull was now white and clean bone, no rotting flesh sloughing off. Its clothes were fucking humble of all things, free of blood and clean and richly coloured. Without the layers and layers of matted fabric it had before, its body seemed a bit smaller and more vaguely humanoid in shape. That didn’t mean it wasn’t still hulking and leaning with tree trunks for arms, but it was... disappointing. Yeah, that was the word. That was what described everything that was happening to Tommy right now.

He was then subject to watching the monster look at the blood it had left on the floor and... make a sound, almost like a grimace. It then wordlessly went to the kitchen and got a rag and a bucket and filled it with soapy water, and retreated to clean its floor.

Tommy recalled the way that blood had been splattered across the walls and ceilings and floors of Dream’s house, and found himself feeling a bit indignant.

Irritated, he knocked a knuckle on the table, ignoring how Phil turned to him, and instead waited until the boar skull mask tilted his way. Then, carefully, knowing Techno was watching him, Tommy leaned down and pressed his palm, still slick with blood that hadn’t finished drying yet, against the precious wooden floors, never breaking eye contact with the dark sockets of the skull.

The sound it made was a low, keening, dying whine. “Why would you do that?” it said, clearly pained, and behind Tommy Phil let out a snort. “Phil, no-! No don’t laugh, this kid is ruining my house! He’s a menace. Are you sure you won’t let me get rid of him?”

“No can do,” Phil replied easily, turning back to stir the pot. “Guess you’ll just have to deal.”

Tommy, still not breaking eye contact, put his other bloody hand to the floor as well, and then began to smear them both around.

Techno suddenly stood up with a huff, and without preamble, marched Tommy's way. He tensed, sitting back up, waiting for something to happen. He wanted to die. He didn't want to die. No, he very much wanted to die. He was just scared because he wasn't sure it was going to happen.

Techno bent down, swiped the rag across the floor, ridding it of blood, and then reached out and snapped up Tommy's wrist. Tommy jerked back, but the grip was like iron, and he found his hand being rubbed vigorously with a soapy cloth, and Techno went so far as to forcibly dunk his hand in the bucket of water, the soap stinging in his wounds. Then it grabbed Tommy's other hand, and Tommy was too slow to get out of the way in time.

This was worse. This was so much fucking worse than death. He writhed and squirmed as the monster meticulously cleaned his fingers, and then none too gently rubbed at his neck, getting rid of the blood there too.

At this point, Tommy tried to swear, but when he made even the smallest sound his abused throat protested whole heartedly, and what he ended up saying was nothing but cutoff nonsensical rasps of air.

Techno let him go, straightening and disposing of the water and getting rid of the bucket, before turning to the room and giving it another glance over, apparently finding it satisfactorily free of blood. "Tell Wilbur to give his pet a bath when he gets back. I don't even want to know what diseases this thing has dragged into my spare bed."

"Tell him yourself," Phil said. "You're probably not going anywhere until he gets back anyway."

Techno huffed in annoyance, and absently batted away the middle fingers Tommy was shoving in its face as it took a seat on the bench a foot away from him. It still sort of smelled like blood this close, but it was muted beneath what must have been some sort of dainty-ass perfume.

What a chad.

Tommy was then distracted from trying to shove Techno off the bench (Why was it so big and heavy? He couldn't move it an inch) by Phil setting down a bowl of soup and a mug of tea that smelled sort of sweet in front of him. "I added honey," Phil said, gesturing to the tea. "It should help your throat feel a bit better."

Tommy sincerely doubted that, since it felt like an entire layer of tissue had been corroded away, but he cautiously took a sip anyway, not expecting to like it. To his surprise, it was sweet and warm, and did feel nice, and he hastily drank a bit more, eyeing movement out of the corner of his eye as Phil dished Techno some soup as well.

Techno had gotten chunks of potatoes and meat in its bowl, but Tommy found that Phil had only given him a thick broth, which was likely for the best with his abused throat. It probably tasted alright, but Tommy had lost most of his appetite a long time ago as well as most of his tastebuds just recently with the medication he'd been forced to inhale. Despite that, he

managed quite a few spoonfuls, before suddenly the inevitable caught up with him after all this time.

A tickle, spontaneous and unprompted, reached his lungs and throat, and the petals followed as they always did. The fit wasn't bad, it was actually the easiest one he'd had to get through in months, but his raw throat made the pain of it sharp enough to cause his eyes to tear up.

When the fit subsided and he looked down, he found his appetite evaporating entirely with little warning as purple petals floated in his soup. The sickly sweet smell reached him, and what little was in his stomach churned in a nauseating manner. Tommy knew without trying that he wouldn't be able to eat any more, so he pushed the bowl away so he could rest his head on his arms on the table.

In front of him, he could hear Phil remove the bowl. "Are you sure you don't want any more? You barely ate anything."

Tommy didn't bother moving or replying, and instead listened as Phil puttered about the kitchen a bit more with a click click, and then something else was being set down in front of Tommy. When he glanced up, he found that it was a smaller bowl with only a ladle of soup in it, free of petals.

"Do you think you can eat a bit more now?" Phil prodded.

Tommy hesitated, but the broth was good, and he knew he'd feel worse later if he didn't eat anything, so he managed two more bites. At that point, his stomach twisted again, and he decided he'd rather not push his luck. He slid the bowl away, but Phil didn't seem upset by the waste, simply cleaned it up without a word.

After that Tommy was bored, and feeling vaguely sick, but it was ignorable. He watched Techno eat out of the corner of his eye, half entertained by how the monster needed to put the spoon through the jaws of the boar skull to get to whatever mouth lay beyond.

"Maybe it's the meat," Techno said, unprompted, holding the spoon unnecessarily daintily in its oversized hand. "I think you cooked it too much. It made the human sick."

"That's not how humans work, mate," Phil responded easily. "They get more sick from raw meat."

"Weak."

Tommy kicked at Techno with his left leg, just to be a dick, and when it gave him a dismissive flick, Tommy lunged forward and swept out an arm, knocking its bowl of soup onto the floorboards with a wet splatter.

He immediately retreated and stiffened, not breathing, and the boar skull turned ever so slowly to look at him. This had to be too far, right? Tommy had to have pushed it enough. He was all too aware of how Phil had stopped as well, unmoving in the kitchen.

Techno reached for Tommy, and Tommy refused to flinch away.

He just watched as the broad, meaty hand drew closer, big enough to probably crush his skull, but instead it landed heavily and firmly on the top of his head. “No,” Techno said sternly, looking Tommy in the eye. “You’ll ruin my floorboards. Don’t do this. I can’t kill you kid, please stop trying to get me to.”

Tommy, in an eloquent response, twisted and bit its hand.

“Ow,” it said flatly. “Kid, you’re killing me here.”

Techno didn’t bother moving, instead idly letting Tommy chew on its hand. Unfortunately, the skin was too tough to break, and it sort of tasted uncomfortably of old blood, so Tommy reluctantly relinquished, letting Techno pull its arm away and instead taking a gulp of tea to get the taste out of his mouth, half watching as the monster beside him stood up with a weary sigh to retrieve the bucket and rag again.

“I don’t think Wilbur could’ve picked a more feral kid to take a liking to,” Phil commented with amusement. Tommy scowled at it, but he was actually a bit more hesitant to piss off Phil directly. He was pretty sure it was the one that gave him the medication last night, and if there was one thing worse than a gruesome death, it was whatever was in that fucking inhaler.

That was, of course, when the door opened once more, and Tommy jerked to look, finding the bitch itself striding in.

“Tommy!” Wilbur called happily, walking forward with its arms wide and full of blistered holes as if to hug him. Tommy immediately flipped it off, as was protocol, and raised his legs to kick Wilbur away and keep it from getting close.

“I don’t think you could’ve chosen a more annoying pet, honestly,” Techno commented, from where it was scrubbing soup from its floors. “He keeps ruining my property value.”

“Tommy’s not a pet,” Wilbur protested, trying and failing to reach out to Tommy for some reason, and Tommy kept refusing to let this prick near him. “He’s interesting!”

“Same thing,” Techno huffed. “Just make sure you actually take care of him. Give him a bath or something. He keeps stinking up my house and wrecking my floors.”

“You let him wreck your floors?” Wilbur asked with clear surprise.

“I don’t let him do anything,” Techno corrected. “Phil won’t let me get rid of him, and he refuses to respect me. We’re having a bit of a disagreement in that I tried to tell him no and he tried to bite my hand, but I’m sure we’ll reach an understanding eventually. Now, if you could hurry up the process and teach him manners and guest etiquette, that would be fantastic.”

“He bit you?” Wilbur said, then twisted back to look at Tommy. “What did Techno taste like?”

“Do not,” Techno threatened, glaring at Tommy. “answer that.”

Tommy, in turn, gave a slow thumbs down.



Wilbur grinned, then frowned, the holes in its cheeks stretching as it did so. This close, it smelled like an old lake, gunpowder, and stale mud. “You’re being very quiet.”

“It’s probably because of the medicine,” Phil commented. “I warned you it’d be hard on him. Throats probably sore as fuck right now.”

Wilbur was frowning deeper. “He’ll get better though, right?”

“He’ll be alright in a few more days. I can still only give him another dose or two, keep in mind,” Phil warned.

“I know I know,” Wilbur said with a flippant gesture. “He’s already getting better though. Look! He hasn’t even coughed yet.”

“Actually, he did, just a bit ago,” Phil corrected. “The hanahaki’s not magically cured, Wilbur. The medicine’s help is temporary. You already know what it’ll cost to try and help permanently.”

Tommy watched them, wondering what that cost was, and saw the way that Wilbur made a face, tongue still full of holes and gashes. It then stood up from where it had taken a temporary seat at the table, giving Tommy’s hair a ruffle as it went by, to which Tommy immediately batted it away and then flipped it off again.

“Well, good to see you’re still being a gremlin,” Wilbur said cheerfully. “Now, I’ve actually got an ongoing project right now, so I’ve got to run. I’ll see you later.”

“Wilbur-“ Phil tried, but got interrupted.

“You’ll help him get a bath, won’t you Phil? Thanks, I knew I could count on you!” Then Wilbur was out the door without waiting for a reply, and the rest of the three occupants in the room watched the door slam shut in silence.

“This is why I said it was a bad idea for Wilbur to get a pet,” Techno commented dryly.

Phil just sighed, finishing cleaning the dishes and then turning to Tommy and tilting its head. “Why don’t we get you cleaned up, mate? Then I can see if I have anything that might ease the pain a bit.”

Tommy was a bit torn. On one hand he wanted to keep being gross and ruin Techno’s day. On the other, he was feeling sticky and itchy, and getting clean was actually pretty appealing. In the end he eyed the door Wilbur had left through a moment longer, then gave in and stood up, following Phil. He probably didn’t have much of a choice anyway.

Tommy was starting to piece together the situation he was stuck in, and every part of it was the fucking worst. He made a mental note that the next time Wilbur even got close to him, he was going to bite that bitch’s hand off. He was going to make the fact that he was being kept alive and not dead everyone else’s problem.

## Chapter End Notes

Techno: i have the high ground

Tommy: yes but i have the floors

That's right, I had the option to give you guys quality Techno content three chapters ago and instead you got Tommy being sad locked in a room ASMR. On another note, people have been gunning for the story being really sad again. Honestly this entire fic is a pendulum that swings between tragedy and comedy at the speed of fucking light, and only I know where we'll end up. Beep beep motherfuckers, car doors are locked.

Edit: I have now crafted a tumblr for my anon works [@space-anon-writes](#)

# Every Performance has to End

## Chapter Summary

There is someone in the garden.

## Chapter Notes

Ah, yes, the three monsters: \*checks notes\*

-playdough man

-the reason this fic is tagged tryphobia

-shambling mound but flesh this time

Honestly I don't know what you guys are so scared of. Nothing bad ever happens in this fic ever.

## Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, arguments, referenced child abuse, blood, gore, body horror, it/its pronouns used in a dehumanizing way, dehumanization, horror elements

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy decided to use his time in the bath contemplating his situation. Basically, it boiled down to two options: try to leave, or try to stay.

When Tommy had first woken up, his immediate instinct was to leave this cottagecore nightmare and go die in the forest or something, but now that he'd had the time to think and time to observe these monsters, he was starting to actually bother to consider the pros and cons.

If he managed to leave, and unfortunately that was a big if, then he could probably go starve and die in the forest. He'd be outside. It would be a death he chose for himself, and it would all be over. It would probably be slow, though.

The difficult part was that he was pretty sure they wouldn't let him leave. Tommy wasn't exactly unfamiliar with that rule. Dream had enforced it harshly enough, had slowly made it

so that Tommy could never get away, and now Tommy was skeptical that these monsters wouldn't simply do the same.

On the other hand, that meant it was easy to stay. They didn't seem to care that he was wandering around the house without supervision. They gave him food, replaced it when he got petals in it, and then Phil had drawn him a bath with warm soapy water and some sort of fragrance, and left him alone to soak in it. He'd been given a room, a bed, and more freedom than he'd had with Dream. It was good, too good to be true, and Tommy knew it was because he'd already done this song and dance with Dream.

When Dream first adopted him, it was the same. Warm cooked meals that he could fill up on, a soft bed to sleep in, a room all his own, and a whole town to explore so long as he was back by a certain time and followed a set of rules that always seemed to get more expansive when his back was turned. Dream had given him so much; he used it to justify what came next. The worst part was that for the first year, Tommy never saw anything wrong with it. Dream would hit him, but he always deserved it. Dream would withhold food, since he obviously didn't need it. Dream would take away his things, because they were never his to begin with. Dream would let him sit and die in the prison of his room.

So, yeah. A picture perfect cottage in the woods with doting monsters. It was a situation Tommy had been through before, and he knew with certainty that it would go the same way. At some point the other shoe would drop, and they'd take it all away.

The only real question was then if Tommy could get himself killed before that happened. Staying meant that he didn't have to bother with escape attempts. It also gave him ample opportunity to slowly piss off the monsters more and more, until eventually one of them just snapped. Maybe he could get Wilbur to lose interest in him. Maybe he could push Techno to just break his neck. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

Tommy groaned and curled up tighter, the water in the bath having started to go cold the longer he sat there. He hugged his knees to his chest, and stared at the water, sort of wondering if maybe he should just slip beneath now and have an easy end. Drowning wouldn't be that bad, would it?

As if to encourage him, his chest tickled again, and he coughed up petals to join the ones already floating in the water. His lungs were still clearer than they'd been in weeks, and emptier, able to hold great gulps of air that Tommy never thought he'd take again. That didn't mean there weren't still flowers slowly creeping in, although some of the petals he coughed up were half corroded from the medicine, dry and shriveled.

That would probably be another reason to try to leave, wouldn't it? If he stayed, his lungs would get bad again, and Phil would force that fucking medication down his throat. All Tommy could remember from it was writhing and screaming in pain, a vivid burning that he never experienced before eating away at his insides as the flesh withered and died with the flowers. His throat still felt raw and blistered with each quiet breath.

It would have been easier to just have suffocated.

But if Tommy wanted to escape, then he'd have to actually plan and do it, and his past attempts at Dream's house had never exactly ended well. Even now, the thought of trying to climb out the window and descend the side of the cottage, or of trying to sneak down the ladder in the middle of the night and creep to the door, was filling him with a sense of exhaustion. Tommy was tired. He didn't want to have to do this. He didn't want to have to try to get out. He didn't want to go through Dream's house 2.0.

He eyed the water again, but then eventually found it in himself to pull the plug. He watched it drain away, and wasn't quite sure what he'd condemned himself to.

The towel that Phil had left for him was fluffy and soft. The clean clothes must have belonged to someone else before, and were bulky and too big on him. He didn't care much.

The bathroom was on the main floor, so when he left, he simply limped down the hallway, back into the kitchen and living room. He saw the front door, the one that led outside, and found that he was too tired to give a shit. He found the nearest reclining chair and sunk into it, pulling his legs up again and coughing into his sleeve. His mind felt soft and pliant after sitting in the warm water, and he noticed the tiny tremors in his limbs as the morning's exertion caught up with him. It was easiest just to sink back into the cushions and let his body rest.

Phil was puttering around the kitchen, and without a word came over and deposited a cup of honeyed tea beside Tommy. "Do you want to read something?" it asked, gesturing to a shelf of books.

Tommy shrugged.

"Want me to get you one?"

A nod.

Phil tilted its head. "Do you want to read anything in particular?"

Tommy shrugged again, not even bothering to see what was offered. This was just like with Dream, wasn't it? Maybe escape would be better, if Tommy would just be sitting in a room reading again.

Phil hummed and went over to the shelf, picking a book seemingly at random. "Wilbur always liked this one," it explained, handing it over.

Tommy stared at the thick book. It was about the military history of Europe. Whatever. It wasn't like Dream didn't bring him the weirdest, most boring shit all the time anyway.

Tommy found himself sinking into his usual cycle of partly reading, partly dozing, and partly just staring at a wall with no real thoughts running through his brain. It was how he'd spent most of his time in his room, although now he got to be downstairs in a chair, and as such, was privy to the way that Phil would come and go with different errands, usually in the kitchen, but sometimes ducking down the hall or outside. When it wasn't around, Tommy

thought about leaving, but then his leg would throb sharply and he'd decide he wouldn't make it far anyway. Phil was never gone long enough.

The monster would sometimes come back over when Tommy's tea had cooled or was drained, and would wordlessly refill the mug. At one point, it added a few extra herbs that it explained would help ease the pain. They sort of did, and although Tommy's throat still felt like crap, it was more tolerable now, and the pain of coughing didn't make him nearly pass out. It also helped dull the ache of his abused leg, and the still healing wounds in the shredded palm of his hand.

The sleeve of the new shirt Tommy was wearing was already stained with flecks of blood and plastered petals, and Tommy couldn't find it in himself to care. Phil certainly didn't seem to mind. Its only real focus was on Tommy's healing throat.

Tommy had woken up late in the day, so he only had to wait for the afternoon to pass before it started getting dark. Supper was more soup, which Techno joined them for again. It had a jar of something suspiciously red and thick with it this time that it unceremoniously dumped into its bowl. Phil didn't eat.

Tommy ate a bit more than he had at lunch, and when he had to cough, Techno surreptitiously leaned over and scooped his bowl out of the way in time. Tommy didn't bother reacting to the gesture. He just sat there and ate, and when that was done, painfully made his way back to the chair to read again. Techno couldn't seem to care less about his reserved behaviour, instead returning to the basement with the smell of blood thick around it without a word.

Night fell, and Phil gently asked if he'd like to go to bed. Tommy didn't protest, exhaustion having made his mind foggy for hours now, simply getting up and going to the ladder and starting the painful, slow journey up, leaving the book behind for Phil to deal with.

As he got settled into bed and stared at the sloped ceiling, he noted that not once had Wilbur shown up again.

The coughing fit that followed was painful, but not unexpected.

-

For the first time in a long time, Tommy only woke up once during the night.

He was roused from a deep sleep not from his own body convulsing, but from loud voices downstairs, muffled through the floorboards, but not as muddled as they were at Dream's house.

Idly, he listened, awake now and staring at the moving shadows on the wall, created from the moonlight filtering through the tossing tree leaves outside.

It was an argument. They used to happen in some of Tommy's old foster homes, but that had been so long ago now. Still, that old bit of fear and discomfort rose up, and his body wanted to move, to hide, but instead Tommy used that kick of energy to get out of bed, slipping carefully across the floor to where the trapdoor was.

He cracked it open just an inch, not enough to look, but enough to hear.

It was Phil and Wilbur downstairs.

"—and yet you promised me. You said, to my face, that you would care for him. That he was your responsibility. And I get that Wilbur, I've kept humans before. I've taken care of them, I've become friends with them, I know what you're feeling and what you're going through. But do not. Do not shove his care onto me. He's not my responsibility, he's yours, and you promised me!"

"I know, Phil, I know, but I can't! I see him and I- I'm worried he's going to go away. I just found him. I just found someone worth- worth paying attention to, and he'll leave me, I can't stand that!"

"Then you shouldn't have gotten attached in the first place. He told you he was dying. I told you he was dying. You were the one that decided to ignore that!"

"I'm not ignoring anything, Phil! I just want more time—"

"Then spend time with him! He was just sitting in that chair all day doing nothing. Neither me nor Techno are going to entertain him, that job falls to you. I'm taking care of all his other needs, and I won't do anything more than that."

"Phil—!"

"No, Wilbur. Make your choice. Either care for him or don't, but don't string him along like this. He doesn't deserve it. He doesn't have much time left."

"He's breathing better now, isn't he? There's time."

"Wil, there's never as much as you think..."

Tommy swallowed, and lowered the trapdoor back into place.

His mind was ringing, soft and veiled, a whispering voice in his ear that he couldn't make out, a swirl of emotions pushing at the edges. Slowly, he made his way back to the bed, the blankets heavy around him. Below, the voices eventually petered off minutes later, and it was quiet once more.

This wasn't new to Tommy. He was used to being talked about behind his back. Their conversation he expected, he could understand. He knew now, just how much of a pet, of a project, of a source of entertainment he was to Wilbur. He knew that Phil was just playing caretaker because it had to, but it would rather have nothing to do with Tommy. He knew that Techno was waiting for the second it could kill him.

What Tommy wasn't ready for was that fucking swirl of emotions in his brain. The little voice in his mind that spoke as an echo of the monsters was buzzing, as if tuned to the wrong station, and it was hard to tell what part of the hurt and desperation and pleading was his own and what was them.

Tommy was stupid. Dream always said he was.

Yet not as stupid as Dream thought.

Phil didn't care about him for its own reasons. It probably didn't want to get attached to something that would die. Tommy could understand and accept that.

Wilbur was... Wilbur was complicated. It sounded pleading and confused as Tommy had listened to it. Somehow, he found himself feeling.... was it pity for it? But then, that would imply he wanted Wilbur to get his way, and that meant that Tommy wanted to live, but he didn't, right? Wilbur wanted Tommy, but Wilbur couldn't stop death. It wanted to keep him for as long as possible, and as much as Tommy wanted to feel needed and important, he didn't want his life held captive. He didn't want to be alive, when all this care, all this attention, could turn from genuine to fake with whatever whims these creatures felt.

Make your choice. That was what Phil had said.

Tommy was stupid. Tommy was so fucking stupid, because he too wanted Wilbur to decide. He just told himself he couldn't care less about what option Wilbur actually picked. He told himself he wasn't scared of the outcome.

-

The next day, Tommy found that the coughing was getting worse and more frequent, but he didn't bother telling anyone.

He woke up to the same room, sluggish mind a bit skeptical of the fact that he'd slept almost soundly through the night, only waking up to the arguing and not to coughing. The windows had been latched when he went to bed, but they were open again now. The birdsong and air was fresh, and Tommy actually took the time to stare outside, at the treeline and the meticulously cared for garden that surrounded the cottage.

Eventually, he forced himself to climb out of bed, beginning his stiff, painful journey downstairs. His leg ached so he kept it off the ladder, and his hand pulsed with healing cuts as it was forced to grab the wooden rungs.

Phil was already in the kitchen downstairs, although when Tommy arrived it wasn't moving, just sort of standing perfectly still like a mannequin in daylight. Only its hat shifted, showing that it was turning its head to track Tommy's movement.



When Tommy carefully approached the table, it finally kicked into motion, dishing out a small bowl of broth out of nowhere, and placing down another cup of honeyed tea. “How is your throat this morning?” it asked, but it sounded automatic, like it wasn’t really thinking about the answer, and instead its mind was somewhere else.

Tommy winced. “Better,” he found himself managing, but the word was scarcely more than a soft rasp. It hurt, but pain wasn’t new, Tommy had to remind himself.

Phil hummed, going back to just sort of standing there, facing Tommy, likely watching him eat, but not responding otherwise.

Tommy didn’t care much. This time he managed to finish half of what was placed in front of him, and pushed the bowl away when he was done, watching Phil take it and start washing it in the sink.

Tommy took that as enough of a dismissal, and made his way over to the same chair as yesterday. He’d just pulled the book back onto his lap, when Phil spoke up from across the room. “Would you like to read outside today?” it asked, and for a moment, the words didn’t make sense.

Outside.

It was letting Tommy outside.

Tommy swiveled, staring out the nearest window, at the sunlight and birdsong and soft rustling leaves. When he turned back to Phil, his nod was jerky with a burst of adrenaline.

Phil tilted its head and drifted over to the door with click clicks, waiting for Tommy to join it. Tommy was quick to follow, getting back up and stumbling as he used the wall to get over to the door, squeezing beyond Phil to stand on the porch before the stone path that led through a blooming garden.

Trees. Wind. Leaves. Insects. Nature. Holy fuck, nature.

Phil hummed and moved past him, picking up a wicker rocking chair that was on the porch beside the door. “Where would you like to sit?”

Tommy immediately took advantage of this freedom and pointed as far down the yard as he could, next to the crumbling stone fence separating the garden from the forest. Phil didn’t seem bothered by Tommy being that far from the house, and moved the chair to the desired location without a word, light and easy on legs that scarcely moved beneath its robes.

Tommy bit his lip and forced himself to move again, except there was nothing in the open space to the chair to lean against anymore. He walked, arms out for balance, and each time weight fell on his right leg it lit up in pain. A grimace plastered itself to his face, and he forced himself to breathe, and walk, because if he was allowed to go outside than of fucking course he wasn’t going to give that up.

He thought of his crutches, now vanished, after he'd passed out in the forest. Either they'd been left behind or the monsters had confiscated them. He tried not to think too hard about it.

"Do you need to use my arm?" Phil suddenly asked, and when the fuck had it gotten here-! Tommy jerked, glaring, shifting his weight back to the left side so he could address this loser.

Phil was standing perfectly still next to him, as seemed to be its trend today. The breeze rustled its veil and hat and the too long edges of its sleeves. Its arm was out, bent, so that Tommy could hold onto it. Could.

Tommy stared at the offered arm, then back up to a hidden face that still haunted his nightmares. He wanted to say no immediately on principle, but that in itself was a novelty. Could he actually decline the offer? Dream would never let him. Then again, Dream would never have asked to begin with. Phil was asking. Tommy didn't know what to do about that.

Hesitantly, he grabbed onto the arm-

-only to almost immediately let go because what the fuck! He jerked his arm back, wiping his hand compulsively on his pants, because what the fuck did he just touch?! He stared at Phil's arm, but it looked like just a normal arm. The fabric looked like it had a normal arm beneath it, but that was very much not what Tommy latched onto.

Phil didn't outwardly react, remaining as mannequin-like as it had been in the kitchen and didn't move away, even as Tommy carefully reached forward and pulled back its sleeve. Yeah. Okay that made sense. He didn't previously know what it felt like to hold onto a five-year-old's wire and playdough sculpture, but he sure as fuck did now, because that's what Phil's arm looked like beneath the sleeve. At least it was wearing gloves so its hands weren't touching the food when it cooked.

"What the fuck," Tommy said, and his voice cracked from pain and disuse and also probably horror.

"Ah, sorry about that mate," Phil responded idly, hat tilted to watch him. "I haven't gotten a chance to put new skin on yet. The old stuff kind of clumps."

Kind of clumps. Yeah, sure. That was what Tommy was seeing.

His stomach twisted and Tommy shoved the sleeve back into place, finding himself entering an internal debate to figure out whether he was going to throw up or not. In the end, he managed to keep his breakfast down, and Phil was still fucking waiting with its arm out as if there was any chance that Tommy would grab it again.

And the weirdest part was that for some reason, Tommy did. Albeit, this time he made sure to find an area that had more mesh wire and distinctly less... skin.

Phil was weirdly solid beneath his grip, supporting Tommy easily. As Tommy started taking steps forward, it matched his pace, practically gliding if not for the click click of its shoes on the stone path.

The time it took to get to the wicker chair was cut in half, but Tommy still couldn't let go quickly enough, flexing his fingers to try and get the weird texture out of his memory. Phil just nodded at him, as if this was normal, and then looked up and turned to peer across the garden.

Tommy followed his gaze, and found that there was an outside entrance to the cellar. Techno was standing near it, a big hulking thing in an uncleaned boar skull that was fresher than the one the day before with an eye still in the socket, layers of clothes matted with blood and dirt, surrounded by flowering pea plants and rose bushes.

"Ah! Techno, mate, could you do me a favour?" Phil called, and then there was a grunt, and Techno was shambling over to them, taking special care to follow the path through the garden and not flatten any plants.

Tommy sank down into the chair as he eyed it, not quite trusting, but also not sure how threatening this monster could be when it was holding a tiny trowel dwarfed by its massive hand.

"What do you need, Phil?" it asked idly, skull tilting as it none too subtly looked down at Tommy.

"Do you think you could watch him for a bit?" Phil said, gesturing to Tommy. "I haven't gotten a chance to eat in awhile, and Will isn't back yet."

"I can watch myself," Tommy protested, but his rasping whisper of a voice was easy for them to ignore.

"Really, Phil?"

"It won't be hard. I think he's just going to be out here reading, I just don't want to leave him alone in case something happens."

Techno grunted, rolling its shoulders. "Fine. I can do that."

"Thanks mate," Phil said happily, and from beneath its robes was the sound of metal scraping, before its wings emerged. They were more massive in person, made of mesh and wires that weren't quite bent into the right shape, and were draped with a dark, stringy substance to imitate feathers, but was closer to soggy seaweed.

Tommy leaned away, the smell hitting him.

"Oh right, and don't be weird," Phil suddenly said to Techno sternly, looking over its shoulder. "I'm trusting you to make sure he's in one piece when I get back, and that includes not being traumatized."

"Yeah, yeah, just go eat," Techno huffed, and Phil's wings flexed with a shriek of metal as it took off, flying low over the treeline until it vanished.

Tommy stared, and wondered how the fuck it even got off the ground. Then, he noted that Techno was still looking down at him, so to be a dick, Tommy cracked open his book, and

without acknowledging the looming monster, began to read about some war or other that sounded like every other war, only partly entertained by the scrawling notes in the margins critiquing the humans' 'silly games'.

A few minutes of this, and Techno let out a huff of breath, that was warm and rotting against Tommy's face.

Tommy, deciding to play nice, glanced up. "Can I help you?" he rasped, watching a piece of clumping hide slough off the side of the skull.

"You hid yourself away that night," Techno said, and something in its voice made Tommy freeze. It wasn't the thing from yesterday, that whined about its floors and let Tommy kick it. It also wasn't the shuffling thing that smelled of blood and dragged something through the house. But its voice was flat, dangerous, and Tommy found himself closing his book to listen, fingers tightening around the cover. "Wilbur said you got locked away, but you did it on purpose."

"Did what on purpose?" Tommy asked, glaring, even as his heart raced.

"Hid from me," Techno answered simply. "You said you wanted to die and you asked Wilbur to send me knocking. Then you changed your mind. You were a coward. Why didn't you admit that to Wilbur?"

"I didn't lie," Tommy said, a hard edge entering his voice. "You think I chose to be locked in that room? I didn't have the key, bitch. I couldn't get out. You couldn't get in. End of story."

The boar skull tilted. The eye finally came loose, falling out of the socket, still suspended by strands of muscle fiber. "No. You fled. You had your guardian lock you in there. Did he even know what you were condemning him to?"

Tommy felt his fingernails dig into the cover of the book. "Don't," he said. He felt cold, ice in his veins, his mind humming static. He thought he might feel ill. "Don't do that to me. You don't get to do that."

Now it was Techno's turn to ask, "Do what?"

"Change the story! Say I'm a liar," Tommy snapped. "Tell me that- that my actions were purposeful, when I told you they weren't. It was a fucking accident! An accident, why can't you accept that, Dre-" Tommy caught himself, choking. "-Techno?"

Techno's hand reached out behind Tommy, landing on the back of the wicker chair, leaning in so they were close. Close enough for the cloying blood smell to surround them, for the flies to buzz in Tommy's ears. "You told Wilbur that I was bad at killing. I wanted to ask what gave you the right to make that call?"

"Then fucking ask! Don't do all this weird shit," Tommy hissed. "The answer's that I was tired, I'd just fuck'n hiked across town, and Dream was dead, and there was no one left and I- I told Wilbur you were bad at killing because I was frustrated. I can't- can't seem to die, no matter how much I want to, and when something finally comes to kill me, Dream ruins it."

That's all. But you killed him, so I guess that's not an issue now," Tommy said, glaring at those empty eye sockets. "The answer is you're great at killing, just not killing me. And I know that's not your fault, that it's Wilbur keeping me alive, but I get to be pissed off just the same."

"You think you want to die."

"I *know* I want to die," Tommy shot back.

Suddenly, Techno moved away, the rocking chair falling forward and causing Tommy to yelp in surprise. "Up," Techno commanded. Tommy just glared. "Up. I've got something to show you."

Tommy scowled at it, folding his arms, but then it reached forward regardless and latched onto the back of his shirt, yanking him to his feet. Tommy went to protest again, but a hand clamped around his arm with an iron grip, supporting him, but giving him little choice on where to move, unless he wanted to lose another bone.

Techno marched them over to where the cellar was, Tommy stumbling and barely staying on his feet as they passed rows of vegetables and flowers and butterflies and bees. There was a sprawl of grass by the basement entrance, as well as a tree stump being used as a chopping block, its wood soaked through with dark stains. Techno let him go, sending him stumbling, as it headed for the doors. Tommy managed to catch himself on the stump, sitting down on it, too shaky to stand on his own. There was an axe beside him, dull blade glinting and not yet cleaned of what it had been chopping.

When Techno opened the doors to the cellar, Tommy could smell it despite being meters away. Rotting flesh and blood, and a small cloud of flies dispersed outside. Techno only ducked into the darkness for a moment, before marching back out to Tommy.

"Hands out," it said, and it really was trying to be Dream, wasn't it? Though Tommy doubted that it would be glass this time.

Tommy held out both hands, palms up, without a word.

He flinched, not expecting what was deposited on them to be warm and rubbery and squishy. He looked down, taking his eyes off Techno for the first time, and found... something in his hands. It was probably some sort of organ, pink and glistening, but Tommy was having trouble recognizing it. He pushed lightly at the deflated tissue with his thumbs, watching it sink with the pressure and then expand back when he let go.

Techno was standing expectantly over him, so Tommy looked back up with a question on his face.

"Lung," Techno said, nodding to the organ.

Tommy stared, and he thought he might see it now, but his gut was clenching. Fuck, Techno really was the worst, wasn't it? Yesterday it had been pretty tolerable company, all things considered, but that was how it went. They'd be nice and friendly and whatever else was

needed to lull Tommy in, and then they'd change without warning. Techno would suddenly accuse Tommy of fucking running away from his death, of letting Dream die on purpose, and then it would taunt him by giving him a lung of all things.

The flower roots squeezed, and Tommy coughed, a hateful sound. He glared at Techno fully now, wondering what scathing remark would come next.

"So?" Tommy demanded. "That's it? You want to taunt me with what I don't have?"

Techno stared down at him, then slowly, one hand reached out from beneath the layers of fabric, and pointed at the organ sitting innocently in Tommy's palms. "Kid," Techno said, low and careful. "This is the lung of the person I took from your home."

Tommy's gaze jerked back to what was in his hands. Static rose up, loud and blaring, and beyond it, Techno still had more to say.

"I think you said his name was *Dream*."

## Chapter End Notes

Huh. Clown town sure is a lot more fucked up than I remember.

Phil: do not traumatize the child

Techno: and i took that as a challenge

Funniest part was that I wrote the end of this chapter before chapter 4 was posted, so people were like can't wait for Tommy and Techno to be friends! Me, who just wrote about Techno handing Tommy the lung of his guardian: that sure is something that's going to happen i guess

One (1) person expressed interest in maybe making art, so I've created a tumblr [@space-anon-writes](#), and almost immediately fucked up and posted to the wrong account, so I'm doing great

# hey so this is fucked

## Chapter Summary

There is a monster in the garden (I'm holding it in my hand).

## Chapter Notes

I think at this point we can safely assume that when I use 'horror elements' as a warning, it's the polite way of saying that something particularly fucked up is going to happen. Not that anything fucked up is happening this chapter. Anyway,

### Warnings

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Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, -->Horror Elements<--, blood and gore, body horror, minor tryphobia, dehumanization, referenced child abuse, it/its pronouns used in a dehumanizing way, referenced/implied character death, suffocation, choking, forced treatment

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy opened his mouth, tried to speak, but his eyes were locked on the lung in his hands and- and how weird was it, that it wasn't just a lung anymore? When Techno had dumped bloody flesh into his palms, it had been gross, it had been gruesome, maybe a bit disturbing. That it was a human lung was to be expected. Then, it said it Dream's lung and- and-

-and why did that change anything?

Tommy stared, and found himself prodding his thumbs into the tissue again, soft and squishy. He was holding Dream in his hands. He was holding bits of Dream. Dream was dead, if this was even him.

"This is Dream?" Tommy asked, and his voice was weird and muted to his ears. He wasn't even sure if he'd spoken. "Do you- Do you have proof?"

"I keep everything labelled," Techno informed him, voice flat. "That's his. If you're looking for identifying features, then I'll have to disappoint you. I only care about what's inside the body. You can ask around though, someone else might have done something with his skin."

Tommy couldn't take his eyes off the lung. That's all it was, right? Just a lung. Just an organ. Everything had them. Everything had to die eventually. He noticed, distantly, that Techno was now crouched in front of him, watching his every move with rapt attention, puffs of its warm, rotted breath hitting his face.

"Oh," Tommy managed. That was all he managed.

"Do you want to know if it was painful?" the monster asked. "Do you want to know if I made his death quick, or if I drew it out? Would you like to know what would've happened to you, if you had taken his place?"

Tommy didn't respond—couldn't respond—around the lump in his throat. He felt flowers curl a bit tighter, sprout a bit thicker, but he couldn't cough if he couldn't even breathe.

"You would be in pieces in my workshop," it informed him, voice low and soft next to Tommy's ear. "You would be nothing but a collection of little bits in jars and drawers. A set of lungs, a heart, a stomach, a liver, and whatever else I might want to keep. That's all that Dream is now, and you had a role to play in it. How does it feel to be responsible for that?"

Tommy forced himself to breathe, to shove air into his lungs and back out, even if it was tight and even if it still felt like he was suffocating. Gently, he let his thumbs run over the tissue again, nails digging in as he tried to bring himself back.

"He would have killed me." That was all Tommy managed.

Techno tilted its head, just a bit. It was a mocking gesture. "Then why didn't you let him?"

Tommy opened his mouth, then closed it. There were a thousand reasons. There should be a thousand reasons. Except he couldn't come up with any, and nothing would be good enough for Techno anyway. Dream hadn't technically actively tried to kill him. At least, it never got to that point. But Dream was the reason that Tommy was dying, and Dream was the reason that Tommy was in this garden now, dealing with monsters, negotiating freedom and life and whatever else would come.

So there was one real reason left, that he could give. That he could say, that Techno might understand. It was selfish. So selfish. But it was true.

It brought a laugh to his throat that he wasn't entirely successful in suppressing, that ended with a vicious cough as his lungs struggled with the unfamiliar sounds. Tommy grinned, a wide, violent thing, that he'd sometimes give Dream when Tommy was just done, when he was done and didn't care that he'd get a slap for his insolence or worse.

"I didn't want to give him the satisfaction," Tommy rasped, and his smile was cruel. It was cruel. It had to be, because otherwise it might have been pleading. "He always wins. He always gets his way. I thought that this, at least, I could take away from him."

Techno pulled back a bit, staring at Tommy's face, and beyond the empty sockets, Tommy thought that maybe he could make out the true eyes of whatever lay beneath.



“You don’t miss him.”

It wasn’t a question.

Fuck. No, fuck this. The second laugh bubbled thickly. “I miss him,” Tommy said, damningly, delusionally, because Techno was wrong and that was the worst part. “I hate myself for it, but I- I thought he loved me for so long. I thought he cared about me. He was the first person to ever adopt me, to want me. And in return I- I loved him back, despite everything he did. He turned into a fucking monster, and now it still- I feel fucking guilty, like I wronged him.” Why did it hurt so much? His chest aching something fierce, spasming with a need to... laugh? Cry? Did it matter, when it was only the coughing that congregated?

Techno huffed, a low sound, and pulled farther away to stand back up, turning a shoulder to Tommy. “You regret letting him die then.”

“I don’t,” Tommy said. He wasn't smiling anymore.

He didn’t miss the way that the boar skull tilted again. “Do you mourn him?”

“I don’t know,” Tommy said.

The beast stopped, turning back to him fully. Carefully, it crouched on the ground, and with its hulking mass, it drew eye level with Tommy, whose focus had returned to breathing, and to the sensation of the lung beneath his fingernails. “I think I better ask the first question again. Do you miss him?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did you want him dead?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you wish you’d taken his place?”

Tommy stared at the lung. He let his thumbs sink back into the soft tissue, creating little indents. “I don’t know.”

“Final question. Do you hate me?”

Tommy blinked, looked up again. His head was dizzy. “What?”

“I killed your guardian,” the monster said patiently. “Do you hate me for it?”

Tommy opened his mouth, but changed the answer partway through. He was sort of using Dream’s lung like a stressball now, his hands shiny with blood from pushing at the tissue. “No, I- I don’t think I really do. I don’t hate you for killing Dream. I- I might’ve hated you for not killing me, for not being able to break down that door, but it’s not really your fault. I don’t think I could hate you for that. I don’t- I don’t know.”

Techno let out a little huff again, a weird noise that it always seemed to make. Tommy wondered if it knew how often it did that.

Tommy found himself going to speak again, even though he wasn't prompted. It was just- Techno was obviously trying to understand something, but Tommy wasn't sure it could ever understand this. Tommy himself wasn't really sure he understood it.

"I didn't care about what happened to Dream," he said, voice quiet, rattling in sore lungs. "I just wanted to disappear. I didn't even think about him, but he- he wanted to ruin my life, I think. I don't know if he succeeded."

He shifted the lung to rest on his lap, so he could stare at his left hand, bandages soaked through with Dream's blood. His fingers flexed and tugged at healed cuts as the skin tightened. "The last thing he did before his death was hurt me."

The world was a bit vague, right now. Staticky and distant. There was still that buzzing in his mind, that didn't make sense, that avoided looking at the bit of Dream that Techno had given him.

That's why he jolted back when large, meaty fingers curled around his hand, claws poking into his skin, but not breaking it. Tommy looked up, a deer in the headlights, to see Techno carefully taking his hand and pulling it closer. Stupidly, Tommy thought back to the other morning, when he had cautiously pulled on Techno's sleeve and raised those claws to his neck, wary, as if Techno could be something broken. At the time he'd mocked the monster for freezing up. Now, Tommy understood the action too much himself.

He could see a vague shine of eyes beyond the sockets of the boar skull. Not enough to pick out details, but enough to know that Techno was staring at his hand. With meticulous attention, it unwound the bandages, letting them fall to the grass. The cuts on his hand were scabbed over, but a few were broken, stuck to the bandage, and tiny beads of blood welled up. His fingertips were still swollen and sensitive from the splinters they'd been pierced with.

"I don't recognize these kinds of wounds," Techno said, voice a depth below the static. "How were they made?"

"Glass," Tommy answered around the lump in his throat. His gaze kept wavering between the solid hands gripping his, and the small glints of eyes beyond the mask. "I broke a lamp, so Dream had me hold onto the broken glass." That was what had happened, Tommy reaffirmed. He didn't- He didn't cut himself, like Dream suggested. The story wouldn't be changed this time.

Techno pushed against his fingers, forcing them to be splayed out, its thumbs digging into his palm and gently tugging open one of the larger gashes with a quiet sting of pain that Tommy didn't let show.

Blood welled, but it was wiped away, and the beast pulled Tommy's palm closer to that face, staring at the small valley in the skin. "It's not too deep," it noted, the rumble passing through it and to Tommy through its hands. It bounced in his skull.

“Dream’s made them deeper before,” Tommy said, although he wasn’t sure why he did.

For a moment, the beast was entirely still, then it released the skin with its thumbs, and guided Tommy’s hand back to where it had been. It pulled the lung off his lap, and Tommy watched it return the organ to the basement in silence. A few more flies escaped the blood-rotted doors, but Tommy’s nose was already too clogged with rust and copper to smell the decay.

Idly, sitting on that stump, he realized that Dream was... gone, wasn’t he? Dream was dead. He was in pieces, and Tommy couldn’t help but think back on what he’d told Techno. How he... he thought Dream might’ve loved him, at one point. That Dream could have cared about him. That illusion vanished after the incident and during the long months of being trapped in that house, but there had been a painful, lingering hope that had existed. That even if Dream was the worst thing that could’ve happened to Tommy, maybe Dream still cared in some twisted, fucked up way.

With him dead, that hope was just... gone, now.

Tubbo wasn’t his friend anymore. Dream was dead. His social workers had probably forgotten about him by now, along with any place he’d been fostered in. The monsters in the cottage only cared about him so long as he was an anomaly to them, a source of curiosity and entertainment. They certainly didn’t love him. They might not be capable of loving at all.

Tommy knew what he was doing with these thoughts, but he couldn’t stop them. He could feel the flowers spread and thicken, digging in eager roots, but he didn’t really deter them, either. He let the coughing fit come, because that was familiar and an old friend, and tried not to think about how frequent the fits were becoming, or how just in the course of two days, Tommy could feel the breaths he was able to take become smaller and smaller.

“Is your throat still sore?” Techno asked, emerging into the sunlight again. Behind him, the wooden doors into the basement had bloody handprints around the handles, and dark, layered stains oozing through the wood. “Your coughing sounds worse.”

“It’s because you’ve been making me talk a bunch, prick,” Tommy rasped back, but there wasn’t any venom. He shifted on the stump, and had to cough again, rough and harsh. His voice had returned for a bit there, but it hadn’t been painless to talk. It was just that Techno’s face was ugly enough to be a distraction from the discomfort. Nothing else. “Also why do you care?”

“Because Phil asked me to,” Techno said.

“Pushover,” Tommy told him, and got two bloody fingers flicking his forehead in retaliation. Gross.

At this rate he was going to need another bath sooner rather than later, and looking down at the blood stains, he knew he’d probably ruined these clothes. Well, at least they weren’t his own. He also might want to ask Phil if it had anything to disinfect wounds, in case the glass cuts got infected from holding literal organs and whatever germs were on Techno’s hands.

“I should probably get you back to your chair before Phil comes back,” Techno muttered, after standing there, rubbing the back of its neck with a meaty palm.

Tommy stared at it. “Didn’t Phil literally ask you not to traumatize me?”

“I showed you one singular lung,” Techno complained. “That’s hardly traumatizing.”

“I would fucking disagree,” Tommy retorted, with a voice crack, and he noticed absently that the static was receding a bit, the birdsong coming back. He breathed a little more even, though the coughing came again. “Carry me, bitch.”

“Pardon?”

Tommy hacked, managing to get out another sentence. “You don’t want me to snitch to Phil? Then carry me back. I’m not getting dragged across the garden again-“

He had to stop, doubling over to cough a bit louder, spitting out a wad of petals onto the grass. It left him shaking, gripping the tree stump, trying to get his breath back, the towering beast not good for anything but keeping the sun off Tommy.

“...Fine,” Techno said, with what Tommy thought was far too much reluctance. It was built like a fucking tank and Tommy was built like a shitty twig. It’s not like this would be hard. Also, if Tommy wanted to avoid getting dragged around without his permission again, then that was his business.

He watched it awkwardly hunch down, latching its hands in front of itself to sort of form a seat for Tommy to sit on. it was a bit too close to being cradled for his liking, but considering neither of them wanted to be in this moment, he’d allow it.

He used Techno’s shoulders to brace himself as he shifted from the stump to the arm seat, his right leg stiff and pulsing and absolutely having none of moving after all the abuse it’d been through the last few days. Tommy could relate.

He stiffened, clinging to the thing’s neck, when it stood up with Tommy in its arms. He was half sitting and half laying there, sinking fingers into blood soaked fur lining. Unfortunately, this also put him at way too close proximity to the rotting flesh mask and dangling boar eyeball. Mistakes had been made. Miscalculations were done. Regrets were had.

He craned his neck to look at literally anything else as Techno lumbered unencumbered back along the garden path. There was a hummingbird feeder by the porch. A few squirrels on the stone wall keeping the forest at bay. A bird was on the roof, jittering its wings.

Tommy coughed, loud and hateful, and if he sunk further against Techno, it was only because it was getting hard to support his own weight.

“Your lungs must be interesting,” Techno said, conversationally. Tommy glared at it, but not really, because he didn’t want to look at rotting flesh sloughing off in this close proximity. “Phil was explaining hanahaki to me earlier. I don’t think I’ve taken apart anyone who’s had it before.”

Tommy snorted, finally letting his fingers release their death grip around Techno's neck, and instead curled his arms around his own body. "You can have my lungs if you want, whenever Wilbur gets bored of me," he muttered, finding that he couldn't quite keep up a loud volume anymore.

"Really?"

He shrugged. "Gives you incentive to kill me. It's not like they're of much use to me now." He hated it though, the thought that his lungs would outlast his body, kept preserved in a jar far past his death. He could get over that, though. At this point Tommy was willing to take whatever he could get, even if he hated it.

"Maybe you can see them too," Techno offered. "When I kill you. I can show them to you before you die."

Tommy opened his mouth, then closed it. "I don't think that's how it works. I'll probably just die."

"It might work, if I leave one lung in and take the other out, and make sure to control the bleeding. Granted, you won't have very long to appreciate it, but it would be a shame to go your life without being able to see what's inside you," Techno explained.

That didn't sound right. But, Tommy supposed, Techno probably had its own view of things. Presumably, this was perfectly normal behaviour for a cryptid, and not at all fucked up.

"Sure," Tommy said, because at least that'd be the end of it.

Techno stooped down to carefully set him on the wicker rocking chair when they reached it. Tommy's book was still sitting there, abandoned, and he glanced at the title but didn't think he'd be reading much of it. He coughed again into his fist, watching through his peripheral vision as Techno took a seat on the grass beside the chair, as if it had been babysitting this entire time and not traumatizing the local teens.

Tommy tried to pick up his book, but he was tired again, and his fingers were shaking. He supposed he'd already burned through his energy for the day, and he had a feeling the rest of it would simply drift by. He leaned back, closed his eyes, but in the darkness found himself opening them to the garden again. There was a wide blue sky overhead. A breeze rustled his hair with a soft swish through the grass that Tommy could feel beneath his bare feet.

"Do you think Wilbur will keep me?" he asked without meaning to. His voice was small, far too vulnerable, and he stiffened but refused to look at Techno.

The monster shifted its weight, claws audibly picking at the grass. "You already probably know the answer to that. You heard them arguing last night too."

Tommy twisted to look at it. "Were you watching me?"

"I was listening, kid," Techno huffed. "I have good ears, and the attic floorboards creak a lot."

Tommy blew out a breath, drawing his legs up into the chair. “You know Wilbur better than I do.”

There was a slow, lulling shrug. “Honestly, he’s never stricken me as someone who cares about people or who wants to be around people much at all. I want to say he’ll get bored soon,” a tilt of the mask Tommy’s way. “But I’ve also never seen him quite this hooked before. Things rarely turn out how we expect them to. Maybe you’ll get lucky.”

Tommy wasn’t really sure what lucky implied in this context. Did Tommy want to die, or did he want to risk having a monster care about him? Techno seemed to imply that lucky meant the latter, but all this time Tommy had been trying so hard for the former.

When he coughed, he looked at blood stained petals in his hand, finding them lumping again in thicker wads. His lungs were tight. Had been since breakfast. Phil had said it could maybe keep Tommy alive for a few weeks, but Tommy was doubting that.

“What do you think of me?” he asked, because why not.

“I’m impartial,” Techno said, but- but there was that feeling in the back of Tommy’s head, that whispered voice that pushed into his mind, somehow silent until now when everything had gone still: *I think I might like you. Strange. I don’t think I’ve liked many humans.*

Tommy stiffened, shoulders hunching up, but that didn’t mean much, right? Liking wasn’t loving, wasn’t caring, wasn’t a promised devotion of investment and time and energy that Tommy simply wasn’t worth. Liking was a fleeting thing, so it was strange that Tommy clung to it anyway, and that he allowed it to fertilize the flowers in his lungs, so that his next coughing fit was sharp and jagged.

He stayed curled up in the chair for a long time after. He would’ve thought Techno would be bored, but the monster seemed content to alternate between picking at the grass to weave it with its fingers, and sitting perfectly still unmoving.

Tommy was warm beneath the sun. He might have even slept, but the coughing fits always brought him back. Each time, Techno would reach over and make sure the book was out of the way, or if it wasn’t fast enough, it would use a sleeve to wipe the petals off the cover before handing it back to Tommy.

Somehow, Tommy did find himself fitting reading in, during that morning and afternoon in the garden. He thought Phil would’ve returned, but it was just the two of them, and a skipped lunch was nothing new and Tommy was not remotely desperate enough to inquire about Techno’s cooking skills.

Instead he tilted his head back again and closed his eyes once more, quietly marveling at the feeling of sunlight on his face. He used to spend hours outside with Tubbo, exploring all the playgrounds in the town, spreading havoc to the neighbourhood, wandering into each store they didn’t recognize and getting banned from half of them. He’d return to Dream’s house at the end of each day grinning from ear to ear and covered in grass stains.

On days when he couldn't go out, when the bruises were too visible or the cuts too deep, he'd be in his room curled up, maybe trying to catch extra sleep, and his head would jerk up at the sound of something hitting his window after Dream had left for work.

Each time, Tubbo would be on the front lawn with a grin and a handful of pebbles to propel at his window, and Tommy wouldn't be able to stumble away from the house fast enough.

Those were painful memories though, because for months he'd sat in his room hoping for another pebble to hit his window. He'd been stuck in the house for so long, surely Tubbo would check on him. Maybe it was because his bedroom had been moved to the back of the house so Tubbo was at the wrong window. Or maybe, after their last fight, Tubbo had finally realized Tommy wasn't worth it, and had never returned to the window at all.

In the end Tubbo never came, and that told Tommy everything he needed to know.

Tommy coughed, absently, and picked up a noise coming from behind him. Footsteps approaching on the stone pathway to the cottage.

He opened his eyes and twisted around, using the arm of the chair for balance as he watched Phil unlatch the little iron gate into the garden, and behind it was a tall lanky person full of holes with a punchable face. Ah good. The bitch had decided to show itself.

"Sorry I'm late, Techno," Phil called, and Tommy noted that it had one of its hands curled firmly around Wilbur's wrist, holding the monster in place. "But look who I found!"

"Hey Techno," Wilbur said sheepishly. "Hey Tommy."

"Wilbur," Techno greeted.

"Bitch," Tommy echoed.

Wilbur frowned, managing to tug its hand out of Phil's grip, eyes set on Tommy. "Why are you covered in blood?" it asked, approaching, but still leaving a good few feet of space between them.

"Techno wanted a hug," Tommy said with a blank face. "I couldn't refuse the puppy dog eyes."

Both the arriving monsters shot surprised looks Techno's way, but its mask gave away nothing. A bit more flesh sloughed off the side of the skull in the silence, landing in the grass with a wet thump. "There was a hug," Techno said slowly. "Tommy said they were essential to human health."

"I did not, bitch!" Tommy snapped, his voice cracking and going hoarse at the volume. "You're the clingy one."

"As if I'd want to touch you, you'd probably give me diseases," it protested.

Phil moved forward to stand a bit closer, hands behind its back, peering down to where Techno was sitting beside the chair. "If you didn't touch him, mind telling me why he's

covered in blood when he wasn't when I left?"

"...Because I wanted a hug?" Techno offered. "I just really wanted to catch a human disease, Phil. It's been on my to-do list."

"Right, mate. And Tommy will verify this story?" Phil asked.

Before Techno could answer, Wilbur had apparently caught on, and it was way closer to Tommy now, trying to get in his space, but Tommy refused to let this fucker touch him. "Are you hurt anywhere?" Wilbur demanded. "You can tell us if he hurt you. Phil, you said he'd be safe!"

"Mate," Phil said, and its voice was light, but there was an edge to it. "I need time to myself too. If you want to ensure he's safe, then you need to be there with him."

Wilbur opened his mouth, then closed it. "I'm busy."

"Like fuck you are," Tommy hissed, and that tickle rose up in his throat, but he still tried to talk through the coughing. "You've probably not even murdered a single kid all week. Pathetic--"

Then the fit grew too strong, and Tommy curled over, hacking into his fist, feeling his chest seize with each painful, jerky inhale and exhale. For a moment, he felt the familiar sensation of being unable to breathe, before he coughed up a wad of flower petals that splattered onto the grass.

He slumped back after, drawing in wheezy, wet breaths, aware that he was being stared at by three separate monsters. He wanted to say something along the lines of 'ow' but didn't exactly feel like talking right now.

He rubbed absently at his throat, and resolutely looked at nothing at all.

"...I need to get something from inside," Wilbur said, turning to leave, only for a long mesh wing to be flung out in its way.

"Actually mate," Phil said easily. "Why don't you swap places with Techno? I don't think he's had a chance to eat yet."

Wilbur opened its mouth, but apparently even it couldn't weasel its way out of this one. Especially when Techno rose to its feet, and used heavy hands to push Wilbur down to sit on the grass where it had been.

Tommy watched the proceedings out of the corner of his eye, until it was just him and Wilbur in the garden.

Wilbur was resolutely picking at the dirt beneath its nails, turning its head so that Tommy could look at the pattern of honeycomb holes in its cheeks. That was how the next few minutes were spent. Quietly, with Tommy openly staring at Wilbur, and Wilbur resolutely not staring at Tommy.



“Techno asked me if I hated him today,” Tommy said, voice a hoarse whisper. He watched the way the monster’s shoulders stiffened, a few cuts flexing open on its face. “I told him I didn’t hate him.”

A moment, but Wilbur didn’t say anything.

“If you were to ask me that question,” Tommy said slowly. “You’d get a very different answer.”

“And why is that?” Wilbur suddenly bit out. Sharp, human eyes turned to Tommy, but Tommy knew that Wilbur wouldn’t kill him. That was sort of the problem.

“Cause you’re a bitch,” Tommy said. “And you’re an indecisive bitch at that. I’m not a pet, you know.”

“I didn’t say you were,” it responded, scowling.

“Really, then why does everyone keep calling me one?”

Wilbur opened its mouth again, but it couldn’t seem to settle on what to say. “We don’t... I don’t care about humans much, but Phil seems to like them on occasion. He’s befriended some in the past. I’ve never seen what he’s seen though, except... You weren’t compelled by me. At all. I checked with Phil, and apparently it’s a rare thing but sometimes random humans will be immune to being enthralled. But it was more than that. You weren’t scared. You weren’t afraid of me. We had- We had an entire conversation. I wanted more of that, I just didn’t realize it until I left your room, until I told Techno which house would be unlocked...”

“If you liked talking to me so much, then why have you been avoiding me like a pussy?” Tommy asked, voice flat.

Wilbur stopped, one long extra-jointed thumb digging into its palm. In the end, the answer was simple. “You’re going to die soon.”

Tommy rolled his eyes and turned away, sinking down into the chair to get more comfortable. He didn’t need Wilbur to tell him that. The flowers said enough.

“Phil... explained it to me,” Wilbur continued. “He said that you wouldn’t live that much longer on your own and that the smart thing to do would be to leave you and distance myself so it wouldn’t hurt as much. The other option was... to care more, to get invested. That’s how you cure hanahaki, isn’t it? Except if I fail, if you don’t feel loved, then you’ll die anyway, and I’ll miss you more.”

Tommy already knew that, but he didn’t stop Wilbur. It was the same with every home, every potential friend. They could get to know Tommy. They could invest the time and effort and energy. But what if it didn’t pay off? What if Tommy died anyway? What if in the end he wasn’t a person worth getting to know?

In all his years, only Tubbo had committed to that gamble, heart and soul, and look how that turned out.

“So you’re going with Plan A, then?” Tommy asked. “Cause you seem to be avoiding me a hell of a lot.”

“I’m... trying to decide,” Wilbur said weakly. *I don’t know.*

“Then don’t waste my time.”

Tommy dragged himself up and out of the chair. It wasn’t worth being outside anymore, not when he had this bitch to deal with. He could be doing other things, like sleeping, or trying to get Techno to kill him.

“Tommy.”

After two steps, Tommy turned, shifting his weight to his left foot for balance, already resenting the long journey to get back inside the house. Wilbur was standing as well, and its hands were buried the pockets of its coat, and its human eyes were on Tommy, unblinking.

“Do you hate me?” there was a desperate edge to its voice. Pleading, almost.

Tommy hated his answer. He’d warned Wilbur that it wouldn’t be the same response he gave Techno, but now Tommy realized it’d been a lie. He didn’t hate Techno. He didn’t hate Wilbur. Sure, he wasn’t a big fan of Wilbur right now, but none of this was really Wilbur’s fault. Tommy was the one who kept fucking up, who kept making hasty decisions, who couldn’t fucking die right. He couldn’t even do it himself, he needed some monster to kill him.

“No,” he said.

There was so much more to it than that, Tommy realized. The bare bones truth was that he could sort of see himself caring about Wilbur. When he saw the bitch at his window after escaping Bad’s house, he’d been relieved. There was the weird need to see it again. The worst was that now, Tommy felt bad for Wilbur. He didn’t want it to be hurt when he died. He just sort of wanted all of this to be over.

And if he stayed... if he stayed then he’d probably care about Wilbur entirely, and Phil and Techno too. Maybe he already did. He cared about Dream. He cared about Tubbo. He cared about every foster home he’d ever been given to, trusting and hoping that some of that care would be given back.

In the end, it simply killed him.

The cough was rough and ragged, another mound of petals that he wiped aside. He wobbled, but stayed on his feet, and looked to the cottage. It would... It would be better if Wilbur went with Plan A, if it distanced itself from him. Tommy wasn’t worth the investment. He wasn’t worth the trust. He was going to die, and he didn’t want to hurt anyone with that.

He sucked in a ragged breath that went too deep in too cramped lungs, and winced at the tickle of petals. He leaned to cough, and managed one sound, then- nothing. Fuck. Fuck, Tommy realized, eyes opening wide as he gagged, making almost no noise, something large and solid blocking his throat. Panic, because he knew this. Panic, because it was unavoidable.

He thought someone might have said his name, but his shaky knees were already giving out on him, and he managed to get one arm out to brace himself against the ground, the other hand at his neck where something was clogged, where he couldn't breathe, where he was choking-

Unfamiliar hands were at his shoulders, trying to keep him up again, and all of this was so familiar. It had only happened less than two days ago, hadn't it?

Wilbur was calling for Phil, Tommy realized, and that was terrifying. He couldn't breathe, and should be focusing on that fact, but instead he sank fingers into the sleeve of Wilbur's coat, and tried to convey with his eyes that it would be so much easier to let him go.

Of course, that didn't happen. Wilbur had his body tilted so Tommy could gag at the ground, and after a breathless minute, something budged, and Tommy's whole body gave a violent jerk as finally it dislodged. The allium, with its bulb and stem and roots, was bloody on the ground in front of him. It only took two days to grow back.

"Phil!" Wilbur was still yelling, drawing Tommy back to slump against it. He wanted to tell Wilbur to stop so fucking badly, but he couldn't talk, he could scarcely suck in one shallow breath after another, desperate not to have another fit, desperate not to suffocate, but wanting to all the same. "It's going to be alright, Tommy."

The second voice in his mind was humming, but it was staticked over. The words were incomprehensible, instead turning into a buzz to match the panic and desperation in Wilbur's voice.

Tommy's fingers were curled into the fabric of Wilbur's rough coat, and he didn't think he could let go, muscles seized in place. Wilbur had pulled him back to lean against it, an arm around his body to hold him, its chin brushing the top of his head as it screamed at the cottage for another monster.

Through hazy eyes, Tommy could see the winged monster, the not-man, come out onto the porch, and he tried to flinch away, fingers curling a little more desperately, voice wheezing rasps that were supposed to be pleas but weren't really words at all.

The beast was outside the house as well, but it just watched. A little more meat sloughed off the skull.

Then the not-man was in front of Tommy, and he tried to writhe, to move away, but he could barely even feel his limbs and they were jerky and he was weak and he desperately lulled his head to the side as if he could avoid it but-

-an inhaler was pushed to his lips, and he couldn't get enough air through his nose, and Wilbur was holding him still, and he gasped a breath in and-

-Screaming, because there was poison in his lungs, corroding them, burning out the flowers. Petals and roots shriveling, letting go of blistering tissue. His chest heaved and heaved and heaved and if Tommy would have eaten something earlier he would have thrown up. He was still pulled tight to Wilbur, but was angled to the side as he hacked up burnt and dried petals and stems and roots, tasting like char and blood in his mouth.

He was crying too, weakly, without much noise over the coughing and large, wheezing breaths that filled his near empty lungs. It was so easy to breathe now. Big gulps of air, the coolness of it hissing and sinking into the burns like acid, and Tommy wasn't even aware of being pulled closer.

He hated that his last real memory before his limbs fell numb, and exhaustion and pained claimed him, was of Wilbur. Was of curling closer until all he could smell was gunpowder pushing back the sweet cloy of flowers. Until all he could feel were arms around him, keeping him there. Until all he could think was that maybe this was safety. Or maybe this was worse.

Until all he was aware of was a light buzz in the back of his skull, humming unintelligible words: *Help, no, safe, pain, please, I-don't-want-you-to-leave-me.*

## Chapter End Notes

Clown town is over, bitches

Wilbur: hey did you know you're going to die?

Tommy: fuck'n wild, tell me more

For those of you keeping up with the comments... mmm. Mmmm. Guess what two chapters are next? Just remember, something bad forever happens always. It'll be fine.

Maybe.

Tumblr [@space-anon-writes](#)

# I think it might be my time to die

## Chapter Summary

There are monsters at his bedside.

## Chapter Notes

Quick clarification:

The not-man = Phil

The beast = Techno

Bitch = Wilbur

You see this? \*gestures to Angst with a Happy Ending\* This is good. But this? \*gestures to It Gets Worse Before It Gets Better\* This I will kiss sweetly, deeply, and passionately under the moonlight.

## Warnings

Coughing, major suicidal thoughts/tendencies, body horror, blood and injury, mild gore, suffocation, dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, dehumanization, minor trypophobia

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The attic was small, Tommy found. Someone had closed the curtains, and the evening light wiggled through the thin fabric enough to see by, but also left the shadows to be long and bathed in red and orange.

He was in bed, layers of blankets tucked around him, enough that he was sweating, but not enough that he didn't still shiver. The quiet room housed his rasping breaths, in and out, in and out, his body not strong enough to fill the new space in his lungs where flowers used to grow. His eyes were cracked open, and he wasn't sure if he'd ever really closed them, if he'd ever really fallen asleep.

First he had been in the garden, and then a blink and he was downstairs, light slanting through the windows, passing a table with two bowls of broth sitting on it, gone cold. He hadn't eaten in awhile. Then he blinked again and he was upstairs and a shape with a veil and decaying wings was over him, filling his vision. A blink, and the window was being latched to cut off the cold evening breeze, but he wasn't sure by who.

Slowly, with the hours, the thoughts came back to him from skipping bursts to slow stutters. There was a deep ache in his chest, like his ribs were fractured, and his muscles were sore from trying to rise and fall. His fingertips kept dancing with pinpricks, his limbs near fallen asleep when he went so long without shifting. Sometimes, his eyes would close and when he opened them, time would have passed and there'd be someone new in the attic or maybe no one at all.

He flinched when it was the not-man, metal skeleton creaking, and he tried to curl up and make himself small, haunted by the memories of wire digging into his cheeks from where a hand that wasn't human held his head still, plastic to his lips and a too-calm voice asking him to breathe in when he knew it would be poison. Memories of kicking and struggling in jerky, uncoordinated movements as adrenaline and exhaustion fought a clumsy, painful battle.

He turned away when it was the monster with too many holes. It was a few hours before the bitch showed up, but it did, and Tommy cracked his eyes open to see its mangled shape leaning over his bed, head brushing the attic roof, before he promptly flipped over to face the wall. "Tommy," it said, pleading, but Tommy refused to believe it. It knew what needed to be done, and Tommy would not be sympathetic to its plight. He tensed, when a hand gently rested on his shoulder, but didn't move away, because Dream hated it when he flinched. Oh... this wasn't Dream, was it?

He closed his eyes when it was no one, because he hated it. Because the only sound would be his raspy breathing and it would be so dark and he'd be alone. He thought that's what his purgatory might be like. A room that he couldn't leave with no one there but himself.

He actually opened his eyes and raised his head a bit when it was the beast.

First and foremost, because his foggy mind was having trouble figuring out how the fuck something that large got through the trapdoor, which was significantly smaller than the one that led to the cellar. He opened his mouth, maybe to say something, but found he didn't have a voice right now, and that was probably for the better.

Still, he stared at the beast that was crammed into the small space of the attic, hunched in on itself with the edges of its boar skull scraping the ceiling beams and leaving little gashes. If only the ceiling could be as sacred as the floors. Further, it was dressed in a clean skull and loose, soft clothes that weren't matted with blood.

Without thinking, Tommy reached out with a shaky arm he couldn't really feel, and ran his fingers through the soft fur lining its cloak. It allowed it for a moment, but stiffened when Tommy used the position to then grab its hand, guiding it to his neck.

"Maybe soon," it said, and the rumbling went through its arm to Tommy's throat, making him blink. "For now, I'm supposed to be the one to get you to eat, since you're ignoring everyone else."

Somehow, it produced a bowl of thick steaming broth, and set it on the end table beside the bed. While this didn't initially convince Tommy it was worth eating, he did find himself bracing his arms and sitting up a bit when he saw the monster produce its own bowl and

begin sipping at it daintily, legs crossed on the floor, unbothered that it was hunched over beneath the slanted roof.

Slowly, Tommy drew himself up against the pillows, trembling with a lack of energy he never had, and pulled the soup into his lap. It sloshed off the spoon, from his jerky movements, but no one said anything about it. The beast didn't care that the blankets were getting stains. It just ate its own broth one spoonful at a time, empty eye sockets on nothing in particular.

Tommy wanted to ask why it ate the same food he did. The not-man apparently left the house to eat, and the hole-filled bastard liked to consume children that it allegedly got to follow it into the forest, but the beast seemed content with soup, even if it would prefer it to be made with raw meat.

Tommy didn't voice any of that, because his throat was fucked and these monsters weren't worth his time. Instead, he contented himself with shakily pulling back on the spoon with unexpected coordination and flinging a glob of broth at the monster in the room, where it splattered against its cape. Slowly, it tilted the skull to look at the mess, then to look back up at Tommy. "At least it's not my floors," it said, and when they were both done, it gathered up the bowls and left.

Tommy blinked, because its layers of clothes must be a lot bulkier than its body, as it simply squeezed down the trapdoor without visible difficulty, fabric fluffing up around it. By far, the most upsetting thing he'd witnessed in this house.

When it was gone, he fell back into the pillows, sinking until he could close his eyes again, breaths wheezy and loud. He didn't get woken up by coughing anymore, at least for now, so for once he could get sleep. He wished he didn't.

-

The field of alliums was dancing beneath a blue and nearly cloudless sky.

Tall stalks swayed under the weight of their petals, surrounding him until they were all he could see. Their roots were woven deep into his skin, securing him to the ground with stitches, and a twitch sent their petals from soft and welcoming to shrapnel that cut his skin.

Pain was familiar though, and he'd felt far sharper before. His arm jerked, convulsing, as he ripped it from the soil. Flowers bobbed in front of him, clinging to his skin, reaching into it to bleed him dry. He wondered if they could tell the difference between a corpse and a living person. Then again, he wasn't sure which of those options he would qualify as being.

They weren't in his lungs this time, but they leaned close when he breathed, promising him again and again that they'd fill his throat and bloom from his mouth.

He stared at the one on his forearm, roots wrapping around and dipping down into his wrist. Its petals dripped with blood, and it danced in the breeze.

Without much thought, he bit down on the fucker, and tore the bulb from the stem. The taste and dry sensation of petals was horribly familiar, but he grinned, because he brought this on himself.

Then he coughed, since he'd gone and eaten a flower.

The petals were soft against his lips, even as they tore through his throat to leave it a bloody mess.

-

Tommy's eyes cracked open, and he felt something annoyingly familiar about waking to a conversation instead of a coughing fit. There were two people in his room near his bed, but he was facing the wall and his eyes were too tired to open all the way. His breathing remained steady, in and out, and he wished it would stop.

The grinding of metal and the click of shoes let him know one visitor was the not-man. The slight squelch of muddy boots let him know the other was the bastard full of holes.

"One more," the not-man said, and Tommy wondered how long the two of them had been talking before he woke up. Further, he wondered why the fuck they decided to have the conversation next to him in the attic instead of leaving him to dream of suffocating in peace.

"But what if he needs a fourth?" the bitch asked, and its voice was small.

"No. One more, that's all I'll give him, and even that will probably be too much. And," the not-man said, firm and deathly even. "That's only if you decide to keep him."

"Phil-"

"The first dose lasted him a little less than two days. Second dose won't be as effective if nothing changes. You have until tomorrow evening. If you let him go, it'll be better if he's asleep."

"...If I keep him?"

"Then he still might die, loving something isn't a miracle cure. But I'll do everything in my power to keep him alive, to give you and him enough time."

Tommy almost stiffened when he felt the bed dip beside him, something sitting, pressed against Tommy's back, a hand running over his shoulder in a way that he hated. It was caring, wasn't it? Maybe it was caring. But Dream did similar gestures, and Tommy knew the last thing he was, was caring.



“Phil... What do you think I should do?” The voice was close, right next to Tommy, and he imagined he could almost feel the breaths against his ear.

“I can’t tell you. In my time, I’ve found the risks worth it. They can be brutal, they can be rewarding, but my life is not yours. If you care about him, Wilbur, really care, then you need to make that decision.”

“...I don’t know how.”

“Then find a way.”

Creaking, and whoever was sitting on the bed stood up again. Tommy listened, but the shifting of bodies was gone, and the footsteps were gone. A lit lantern somewhere was dancing light onto the wood beams in front of his face.

He was alone again, at least, until a voice echoed unfamiliarly from behind him, “One more day.”

He thought it might be a warning for him, but he wasn’t sure. Instead, when he heard nothing else, he closed his eyes again.

-

When he stared up, the sky overhead the alliums was beginning to bleed colours, oranges invading the pale blues, with clouds gathering. It must be growing closer to evening, but he wasn’t sure how long he’d been laying there.

He thought there might be a forest near the field.

He never really acknowledged that fact. Mostly because he doubted he could ever work up the strength to see it. Raising a hand was the most he could do. To lift his body enough to peer around the field would probably shred his skin to nothing before he got the chance. That, and he had a flower growing in his eye. Its petals obscured his vision, and he was too weak to try to pull it out. Besides, its roots could go as deep as his own nervous system, and there were surely more pleasant ways to die.

He could hear the forest, though.

Beyond the soft brush of flower stems in the wind was the crackle of branches against each other and the rough crinkle of leaves. Maybe it was autumn, and the forest was dry and coloured orange and red, and that’s why he could hear it so clearly. Maybe it was winter, and it was the sound of the frost-stiff leaf litter curling in a breeze. Maybe it was summer, or spring, and the leaves just felt like being noisy. Maybe there was no forest, and it was the flowers playing tricks on him.

His fingers curled into the soil again, sharp roots cutting deep at the movement like razor wire. This time, he didn't raise his arm, because there was no point. Instead he settled for pulling up his hand, rolling his wrist, listening to the stitches tear.

He breathed deep, and watched the flower in his vision dance in tune with the ones growing out of his chest. They were heavy, so heavy, and he wasn't sure if he'd have the energy to breathe again.

One allium, the one in his eye, dipped a little lower than the rest. Its petals were soft when they brushed his lips. A promise.

-

Morning in the attic wasn't too different from the evening.

Tommy cracked open his eyes and his chest seized uncomfortably with a few coughs he didn't have the energy for. He found that sleep had done little for him, and his limbs still felt dead and his chest still ached as if there was a weight, and his throat was still half corroded and burning.

The lamp that had been lit beside his bed was dark again, and curtains were still in front of the windows, although the thin fabric did little to block the light. Birdsong was strong and unimpeded from where it came outside. Thoughts of the garden though, brought pinpricks to the edges of Tommy's eyes. He hated that he knew he'd probably never see the outside again.

It made him wonder how he'd be killed. The not-man said they'd do it in the night, when he was asleep, but Tommy wasn't sure he'd be able to sleep that deeply again. Maybe he could though. Tonight was an important enough reason to.

He wondered if they'd let him suffocate, or slit his throat, or feed him poison. He wondered if the death would be soft and gentle. That's what the not-man promised, but promises didn't mean much.

Tommy didn't get to daydream long, staring blankly at the exposed beams of the ceiling, before the trapdoor creaked. "Tommy," said someone familiar, but that person was a bitch and Tommy wasn't moving, his limbs still and dead.

The floorboards murmured as it pulled itself up from the ladder and onto the floor, footsteps a heavy squelch. For once, it didn't loom over Tommy, but instead took a seat beside the bed on the ground, back resting against the frame. If Tommy were to reach over, he could probably run a hand through its hair.

"I wanted to ask you a few questions," it began, "and I guess it's up to you if you want to answer them or not."

Bitch of the Day award went to this guy, who assumed Tommy would have a voice, let alone want to speak with it in his sorry state. To acknowledge this injustice, and to urge it to just continue already, Tommy shoved a knee into its neck at whatever terminal velocity he could manage while in bed. Unfortunately it wasn't much.

"Ow," it hissed, but didn't move farther away, which Tommy found insulting. "Fine, I see you're in a good mood this morning. Jesus."

Tommy waited, ready to ram it with his knee again, but it started talking, voice kept as even as it could, even as it wobbled on some words. "I-I wanted to start with- with what you said yesterday. I thought you hated me, but you said you didn't. Why... Why don't you hate me?"

Now Tommy was the one who was quiet. Gingerly, he swiped his tongue through his dry mouth and really, really didn't want to have to talk, but... But whatever got the bitch to leave the fastest. That's why he was answering, and not because this would probably be one of the last conversations he'd ever have. "...Didn't do anything to make m' hate you."

"But I did!" it protested. "I mean, first off, yeah, I was trying to kill you when I visited your window. Then I just- I sent Techno to your house. I'm the reason that your guardian is dead. I'm the reason you got locked in a room. I'm the reason that you're alive now, that you're in pain. All of this is my fault."

Tommy shrugged, a shallow motion that stirred the blankets just slightly. When he spoke, his voice was barely loud enough to hear, even in a quiet room, a painful rasp to its edges. "...s my fault too. You're a dick, but you're just doing what you've always done. 'm the one who fucks up. 'm not going to hate you for that."

"...They're my fuck ups too," it murmured, but Tommy didn't have anything else to say. "Phil... Phil said that even if I choose to care about you, you might not get better. That you... have to care about me as well. It has to go both ways. If I did- If I did choose to care, would you accept that?"

That was an easier question to answer. "'m not affected by people I don't care about," he said. It wasn't really worth being a secret anymore. "If I've coughed up petals because of you, that's your answer."

A minute again, before it continued. "Alright. Final question. Can I help you stay alive, or do you want to die?"

For once, Tommy actually turned to look, letting his head fall to the side to see the monster leaning against his bed, staring back, human eyes begging, mouth pulled tight. Wilbur had a look of guilt on its face that sort of pissed Tommy off, but lucky for it, he was having a hard time feeling anger right now. Instead he felt mostly empty. Beyond that, a potent surprise, disbelief, and fragile hope. Maybe fear. Because never once had someone asked what he wanted.

"Better question," Wilbur said slowly, never breaking eye contact. "Do you want to live?"

"There's nothing to live for," Tommy said, because that was the answer.

“Then what if I give you something?”

Tommy felt his lips twitch to part, but he stared at those unblinking brown eyes that seemed, in this moment, to have an infinite patience that Dream could never hope to match.

“Why did you want to die in the first place?” it pressed, twisting more so it wasn’t looking over its shoulder, and instead drew closer to Tommy.

Tommy’s eyes flickered down, breaking contact. “...Didn’t want to suffocate,” he rasped.

“Why monsters?” it continued. “You could have tried to die any other way. Why choose a monster?”

That really had been Tommy’s undoing, hadn’t it? Earlier he’d been sitting in a bath, and he could have chosen to drown. He could have fallen out a window again, and hoped he broke his neck this time. He could have snuck downstairs in the middle of the night and pulled a knife from the kitchen. He never did.

“Your final question was three questions ago,” Tommy told it.

“Humour me.”

“I don’t know,” he said, voice hoarse. Again, it was the only answer he could give. It wasn’t his problem if it didn’t like it. He’d given the same response so many times with Techno, but if anything, that just made it all the more interested.

Wilbur stood up to its height, looking down at Tommy. “Will you be alright until evening?”

It got a middle finger, but all that did was make it crack a smile.

“Techno told me he’s never met anyone ruder,” was the last thing it said to him. “Phil said the floor’s grace period is over.”

Another middle finger joined the first, before Wilbur had descended the ladder and closed the trapdoor, leaving Tommy alone in a room bleeding dawn light. When the sky changed again, and it got dark, it would be over. Until then, Tommy traced the swirls in the wood in the ceiling, and counted all the cluttered boxes he could see from his bed. He felt heavy in a way he couldn’t describe, and empty, but that emptiness was threatened to be consumed with thoughts, so instead he settled for pretending he could float with his fingertips tingling with numbness.

This time, he was only left alone for about an hour, before something came up the ladder again.

The beast’s large form was like a cartoon as it entered the attic, filling the space in its entirety. In its hands were two small bowls, dwarfed by its size.

“Breakfast,” it said unnecessarily, and Tommy was already moving to sit up.

Idly, he tried to match the monster spoonful for spoonful, just because he was bored, but ended up losing too much soup that way, his arm horribly shaky in a way that felt bad as blood sluggishly flowed back through the half-asleep limb.

“You know,” it said conversationally, as Tommy had to take a moment to cough, its hand moving forward to take his bowl out of the way before the petals could reach it. “If you were ever looking to do me a solid, to just be a real good person, I’d really appreciate it if you could be less antagonistic towards literally anyone else, so I wouldn’t have to get stuck with babysitting duty. Just look at someone like they haven’t ruined your day that’s not me. Please. I have so many projects to work on but Phil says you won’t eat if it’s not me.”

“Suffer,” Tommy hissed, the word probably unintelligible, as he shoved another spoonful of broth in his mouth.

“I don’t understand you, kid,” the beast groaned, and thunked its head against the ceiling. “Why do I have to be your favourite?”

Tommy paused, stomach turning, spoon sitting in a half full bowl. “Why do you like me?” he asked instead, voice hoarse.

“...I don’t,” the monster said, but Tommy’s expression was unimpressed. “Fine. You’re alright, but I’d probably like you better if you didn’t actively try to ruin my day. I know you probably weren’t planning to make me sit in my own attic and drink soup I don’t want, but you’ve done it anyway.”

Tommy shrugged, unbothered, and forced himself to take another mouthful.

“If I die,” he said eventually, idly watching his own reflection in the spoon. “You get my lungs.”

“Yeah...?”

“If I live,” he ventured, quietly. “Would you care about me?”

“No,” the monster answered easily, but Tommy had been feeling a building buzz in the back of his head, and there were words now, with this thought: *I probably would*.

Tommy levelled Techno with a second unimpressed look as it let out a huff. “Don’t test your luck, kid.”

So they ate their soup in silence, and for once Tommy’s bowl was empty, and Techno collected them and headed for the ladder, but paused before it descended. “Oh, by the way Phil is probably going to try to bring you tea later. That’s my way of saying I better not see him show up in my workshop two minutes later to give me puppy dog eyes because the human was being mean to him. I did not sign up to be your babysitter and personal servant.”

Tommy flipped it off before it left.

Sure enough, another hour or so passed by in weird floating emptiness, during which Tommy tried not to think too much about anything, before he got his third visitor of the day, which

was frankly too many. The first thing the not-man did was place steaming tea on the bedside table, before flittering around the room opening curtains and windows, letting in a soft breeze and the smell of sweet flowers that Tommy gagged on.

“I’ve added something to soothe your throat and relieve some pain,” the not-man began, handing over the mug once Tommy was finished coughing.

He didn’t take it, and instead stared at the monster. He could practically feel Techno’s animosity radiating from the basement.

“Last day,” the creature pushed patiently, head tilting, veil in place, leaving its state of mind a mystery. At those words, Tommy gave in and drank the tea, wincing as it was still too warm against his scorched throat.

“Everyone says you’ve cared about humans before,” he murmured, staring at the liquid in the mug, coughing a few times, only able to draw in shallow breaths.

The not-man stiffened, from where it had been cleaning up, its wire wings idly expanding and retracting. “Sometimes. It’s a rare thing. Techno was around when I befriended a few of them, although he’s always been reluctant to get to know them. Wilbur says he’s never met a human he liked.” *Until you.*

Minisculely, Tommy’s fingers tightened around the mug. He could feel its warmth burning, but didn’t put it down. “If he keeps me,” Tommy said quietly. “Would you care about me too?”

The wings flexed again, but that was all. “I might.” *I don’t want to. But I might.*

Tommy nodded, like he understood, and focused on letting his tea cool on its own before taking careful sips. Phil busied itself, for a bit, but after it simply hovered at his bedside, waiting until he was finished to take the mug and retreat for the ladder. “Thanks for not splashing any on me,” it said, and Tommy flipped it off while coughing roughly into his arm.

-

The sky overhead the field of alliums was inundated with colour. Mixes of yellows, pinks, and oranges, with purple bleeding into dark blue. Thick clouds dispersed themselves, hiding some of the tragedy. Waiting for a storm to come.

He twitched a finger, felt a petal cut it, felt the skin begin to bleed, and didn’t move otherwise. The wind picked up for a moment, stirring the alliums to life, and they gently brushed his body, merciful in his compliance. With the growing gusts came a greater racket from the unseen forest.

He wasn’t even sure if it was real.

He closed his eyes and tried to picture what a forest was like, but the roots digging into his skull made it hard to focus. Every time he tried, his concentration ended up breaking with a sharp gasp of pain, the alliums squeezing ever tighter.

There was one wrapped around his throat like a collar with roots going deep, right over where petals had previously ripped the skin. It bobbed in front of his vision in a taunting manner, and was soft when it brushed against his lips, and soft when it tore open his neck.

-

The second evening in the attic was the same as the first, as if time was on a loop.

The windows were shut again after a day of being open, and the thin material of the closed curtains let in a red and orange glow that casted long shadows over the room. It was quiet, very quiet, and Tommy almost mourned the company, as scarce as it had been.

The beast brought him broth twice more, too much for Tommy to ever finish again. They'd sit and eat in silence, and then it would leave.

The not-man brought him tea once more, wings fluttering in shifts and bursts. At one point it reached out a hand that brushed Tommy's arm, but when he looked up it simply left.

Wilbur never came back.

Tommy coughed again, in more frequent fits that lasted longer and grew worse. He still wasn't coughing up wads of petals yet, but he was out of time anyway. All day he'd been aware of nothing but the approach of evening, and now it was here.

His eyelids drooped, but he hadn't managed to really fall asleep just yet. He wanted to. He didn't want to. He wondered what would happen if he stayed awake, if his death would be worse. He wondered what would happen if he fell asleep, if his death might be gentle.

Thoughts arose, of what everyone he ever knew might think, if they remembered him at all. Would any of Dream's friends miss him, or would they be too preoccupied with the friend they lost? Would any of his past foster homes think of him again, or was he just another face in a sea of children that came and left? Did Dream ever think of Tommy after locking him in that room, before the beast came to rip him apart? Would Tubbo think of him, or that bitch Ranboo? At least, Tommy supposed that Tubbo had a new best friend now. He wouldn't have to miss Tommy, even as Tubbo's eyes had refused to leave him as he was driven away.

"Are we friends?" Tommy had asked, over a year ago, sitting on top of the monkey bars on the playground that sat on the route between their houses.

"Yeah probably," Tubbo had answered, concerningly close to breaking his nose as he hung upside down, trying to pour water from a plastic bottle into the cap.

“I’ve never had a friend before,” Tommy had mumbled, burying his face into his knees.

“Yeah, me neither,” Tubbo had said easily. “So I guess that makes us best friends.”

Nobody else had thought that Tommy was worth it.

Nobody else, until the beast and the not-man, who thought they might like him. Nobody else, until the monster at his window, that tapped on the glass panes and pouted at him. It said he was interesting. *I think I wanted to talk to you again*, a voice had said in Tommy’s mind, speaking its thoughts in the darkness of a freshly shattered porch light.

*What if I give you something? (What if I give you something to live for?)*

Then the answer would change, wouldn’t it?

Tommy curled up in the bed, cold beneath layers of blankets, hugging his knees to his chest as it grew darker and darker. He pressed his face close to his body, just breathing, and closed his eyes and pretended he didn’t hate everything. Pretended just once, that this time he’d get a happy ending.

Strange, how he didn’t know what a happy ending looked like anymore.

-

He was in a field of alliums, the sky wide and open above him.

It was bathed in deep blues and blacks after a sunset he’d never seen, and as he watched, evening long turned to dusk turned to night. It was cold, felt down to his fingers against the frigid soil, and in his cheeks that burned in the icy air.

There were thick clumps of clouds, he noted. Darker and heavier than they’d been in the day. He wondered if it might rain, and if that would change anything for him.

The flowers drew closer and tighter, curled around his arms and torso and legs and neck, and cradled his head. There were two more flowers growing in one of his eyes, although his other was spared, so he could watch the late night sky.

There were crickets in the distance, as unseen as the forest that bristled gently and crackled. He wondered if it was a large forest, if it surrounded him on all sides, if he might be able to hear it clearly if there weren’t so many flowers growing from his ears.

“I think I’ll miss you,” he said to no one, and it let him have a voice, for that sentence, before it was taken again. Hoarse words that were heard by no one, not even himself.

The stems and roots grew a bit tighter, not cutting him, just holding, and when he breathed in it was enough to know they were in his lungs. They grew, twisting up his throat, to his mouth,



and their petals were soft on his lips.

He was alone in the field of alliums.

-

Tommy fell asleep, not knowing if he'd wake up again.

## Chapter End Notes

What does a happy ending look like?

# An Epilogue Given Early

## Chapter Summary

Tommy is in a forest.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Tommy.”

He breathed in, lungs expanding with the soft press of flowers. His eyes opened, vision blurry, feeling trickling back into his body. Ahead of him was the wood paneling of the wall, dark, with only silvered moonlight to see by. He could hear his own breaths rasping in the quiet air, and a dull buzz in the back of his mind.

“Tommy.”

Awareness trickled in, and with it he noticed a weight pressed against his back, of something sitting on the side of the bed, causing a dip in the mattress. His fingertips tingled as he moved them and found the strength to turn to look behind him.

There was a monster.

Its face was long and gaunt with gashes running the lengths of its taut skin and blistered holes clustered high into the cheekbones. Two gaping spirals burrowed into the eye sockets. It stared at him in the darkness, breathing, a horrifying visage made of orifices.

Then its eyelids blinked open and human eyes took the place of the emptiness and oh. It was just Wilbur.

It was Wilbur, and it was far, far past evening.

“Tommy,” it whispered again, and its hand moved to rest on his shoulder, an uncomfortable weight that felt too much like Dream, like a gentle touch of false sincerity. But then it leaned forward more, pressing down more of its weight, and Tommy could relax because Dream would never draw closer than he needed to. “Come with me.”

It took a few moments for the words to register, but even then, Tommy didn’t move. He didn’t, because his chest hurt to breathe and his lungs were tight and he didn’t have the energy to spare. His eyes, tired and haggard, stared up at Wilbur.

The monster stared back.

“Tommy,” it prompted in a honey-riddled voice. “Come on, come with me.”

It looked so expectant, so eager, so Tommy closed his eyes again, curling up tighter and tucking his face into the blankets, pretending like he couldn't see the afterimage of a blistered, swirling face burned into the darkness left behind. His body was pleasantly light and numb, almost as if it wasn't there to begin with, and he'd much rather remain as he was, even as the soft brush of the blanket against his cheek felt so much like the gentle touch of the alliums from his dreams. Even as a painful cough overtook him.

The lack of response didn't stop the monster.

Carefully, arms pushed themselves under Tommy's body, and he was being lifted up, cocooned in a hundred different blankets. He blurrily looked around again, finding his head lulling to Wilbur's shoulder as his body was tucked against it. This was familiar, he thought, but in his groggy state he couldn't remember why.

Logically, there was only one thing to say about the situation.

“Fuck you,” he slurred, his words quiet and rasping and almost gone. His throat burned, and he swallowed, and wished he could sleep again. Wished it didn't feel like there were roots in the tissue, twisting it taut, forcing another coughing fit.

“Rude,” said Wilbur, voice soft with something amused to it, and it simply pulled him closer to a body that smelled like wet gunpowder. “We're going on a fieldtrip.”

The amusement caught Tommy off guard. He knew he was going to be killed, but he was stupidly expecting some sort of reluctance or hesitation on Wilbur's end. Then again, it's not like he really knew the monster at all. It was probably a bit selfish to expect his death to be grieved over. It was more likely for it to be waiting with ripe anticipation rather than reluctance.

Whatever. At least if he was going to be killed, it would be out of this room and out of that fucking bed.

“Alright,” he mumbled, and tried to stay awake.

One of the attic windows was open, thin curtains drifting in and out with the airflow, and Wilbur headed towards it. Shame, Tommy was looking forward to watching the fucker try and navigate the ladder while holding an armful of limp teenager.

Of course, Wilbur just used the window instead, sitting on the sill before moving both feet out onto the small outcropping of slanted roof. Tommy waited for them to fall, but they didn't. Wilbur simply jumped, and was near silent when it landed.

They were behind the cottage, on the other side from where the vegetable garden was, and Tommy craned his neck with renewed interest to see what he'd never get to explore. There were more flowers here, growing in the ground or in pots or up wire mesh, but there was also a good stretch of lawn, and a tree caught inside the low cobblestone wall that Wilbur leapt over without much effort, Tommy barely getting jostled.

He let his head rest back again, watching the branches pass overhead as Wilbur carried him deeper into the forest. It was a cloudless night, and stars greeted him enthusiastically, more than he'd ever seen in a life surrounded by light pollution. He almost wanted to tell Wilbur to go find an open field to stand in, so he could see them better, but he was mad at Wilbur and had a death to get to.

There was some sort of trail, made through the undergrowth, a little too wide to be that of an animal. Wilbur walked it confidently, long legs covering ground, no real strain on its face even as it carried a fully grown teenager.

"Where're we going?" Tommy eventually decided to mumble, craning a bit to see over Wilbur's shoulder when something dark and quick flew by. Maybe a bat? He and Tubbo had found a roost of those when they were exploring old abandoned buildings. If Tommy got home late past curfew that day after watching the bats for hours, then that was his business.

"It's a surprise," Wilbur answered with an audible grin.

Alright, Tommy was ninety-five percent sure he was going to die now. What was that saying? Two go into the forest, but only one comes out. Although admittedly he didn't know why Wilbur was going through the effort. He doubted any cops came out here, so there was no reason he couldn't have just been killed in the house. Tommy should probably stop complaining.

It wasn't a room. It wasn't a bed. Tommy would enjoy it, whatever it was.

He waited, patiently for his death, coughing occasionally. His cheeks were getting cold in the night air, but the rest of his body was warm, wrapped in the blankets that had gathered on his bed over the few days he spent here.

Finally, after maybe ten minutes of walking, Wilbur deviated from the dirt path and wandered between identical trees. They thinned out just a bit, and when Wilbur stopped in was a clearing only a few meters in diameter, but open enough to see hints of the moon through the tops of the trees.

Tommy found himself being lowered onto grass, and twisted a bit so he was placed upright against a tree. He was expecting a dagger or gun or a flash of claws, but Wilbur simply walked a few steps away, then took a seat with folded legs, facing Tommy, spiral holed eyelids blinking slowly.

"Do I get to die now?" Tommy asked, because it was weaponless, and if it didn't want to claw his throat open, he highly doubted it would want to use its fangs to tear his neck out either. He hoped to god Wilbur had a plan, because he was tired, and his eyes were drooping. Coughing was harsh and painful with icy air to grate against the burns.

"I don't think so," Wilbur speculated after the coughing fit subsided, human eyes on Tommy. "I think I want to keep you."

"You think or you know?" Tommy bit back automatically, but that was before he realized what Wilbur had said. Had actually said. "Wait, what?"

“I know,” Wilbur corrected itself easily. It was staring at Tommy, unwavering, legs crossed, arms wrapped around itself. “I want to keep you. I want to care about you.”

The words were too fucking easy.

“You don’t,” Tommy said quickly, something desperate, something rushed, as all at once the numbness snapped away and awareness flooded in. His voice broke. His limbs were trapped in this blanket, blocking off escape, because Tommy didn’t want to be here. He didn’t want to hear this.

“I do,” Wilbur responded, and damningly, a voice echoed the sentiment in the back of Tommy’s mind, every inch filled with a sort of affirmation and certainty that stole Tommy’s ability to breathe for a moment. *I care about you.*

“Fuck you, you shouldn’t,” Tommy began again, the desperation creeping. He squeezed his eyes shut, as if that could block out the emotions curling into his brain. “I’m not worth it.”

“How do you know?” Wilbur pressed, and Tommy didn’t want to look at him.

“I- Nobody’s ever loved me. It never works out. If they get to know me, then they hate me,” he admitted, voice breaking. “I’ll disappoint you.”

“Well, I have one advantage that nobody else has,” Wilbur said. At Tommy’s wide-eyed, incredulous, hoping look, it continued. “I’m not human; I won’t be like them.”

“That’s worse,” Tommy stressed. “You get how that’s worse, right? Come on, if you can find my crutches I think I can take a walk with you, if it’s short.” Please just stop. Please just make this simple.

Wilbur’s head tilted to the side, tiny holes flexing open on his cheeks like gills. “Do you... Did you think I brought you out here to kill you?”

Something horrid sunk into Tommy’s gut. *Lucky*, Techno had said.

“Uh... yes?”

Wilbur blinked. “I- No. No, Phil said you liked being outside. I brought you out here because I thought you’d like it.”

Tommy tensed up. He was aware of the bat of wings somewhere unseen, the cuts of moonlight, and the swaying of branches all around him. “I like it,” he reluctantly admitted, and his voice cracked while saying it. “It’s... been a long time since I’ve been allowed to be outside this much.”

“I’ll take you out every day,” Wilbur promised with a flash of eagerness, leaning forward. “We’ll find mud puddles for you to roll around in, and you can make sure Techno’s floors suffer.”

“I think you’re getting humans confused with puppies,” Tommy joked, strained. “I’d rather go find a lake to jump in and make his house smell gross.”

“Whatever you want to do,” the monster said. The monster promised. “I- I care about you.”

“You don’t.”

“I do. I don’t know how to prove it to you.”

The problem was that Wilbur didn’t have to. The problem was that every time it said it, every time its eyes lingered on Tommy, with every word it uttered, the little voice hummed and told it back to Tommy in his mind, a hundred times over with complete affection: *I care about you.*

“This is fucked,” Tommy said, breaking. “You’re going to take it back.”

“I won’t.”

“You will.”

“Stop putting words in my mouth,” Wilbur hissed. “Ever since I met you, the only thing I’ve wanted to do was talk to you again. I tried to ignore it when I sent Techno to kill you, but I- When he took his kill apart, I thought it was you, and I’ve never regretted like that before. I’ve never before cared if a human lived or died, but you’re different, and I care, and I want to help you live.”

“What reason would you give me?” Tommy demanded, “To keep living.”

“I’ll give you any reason you want and any reason I can find,” Wilbur said, eyes intent. “For now, the best reason I can give you to remain alive is that there is someone who wants you to keep living.” *That someone is me, but I don’t know if I’m good enough to be a reason.*

Tommy opened his mouth, then closed it. Suddenly he was breaking eye contact, shoulders hunched up, fingernails digging into his palms beneath the blankets. “I’m not a pet,” he said, words harsh.

“I know. I’m teaching myself to be- to do better. I won’t treat you like one.”

“You can’t turn into Dream,” Tommy said, because that was also important. Wilbur could be kind now, but that could change. Tommy had seen it happen a thousand times over. “You can’t turn into what my guardian was.”

It bared its teeth. “I’m not a human.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

A tilt of the head. “Then tell me what they were like, and I’ll do my best to never be like them. I won’t hurt you.”

“You already hurt me.”

“Then I won’t hurt you any more. I’ll ask, now. I’ll do whatever you want. If- If you want to die, then I’ll kill you.”

“Promise me,” Tommy demanded, leaning forward, voice loud, but pain wasn’t registering. He had no idea what he was doing, he just knew he needed to stop, to deny everything, but instead his mind kept pushing, as if this would happen, as if he’d give Wilbur a chance. “If you stop caring. If I start dying again. If none of this works out, then you’ll kill me when I ask you to, and you won’t hesitate this time.”

An open mouth, before a mind was made up. “I promise you.” *I promise you. I hate it, but I promise you.*

And here was the fucked up thing: Tommy might not want to die.

Because as soon as he heard those words, his brain hummed something like relief, like it could relax, like some fight he’d been enduring was over even though it wasn’t. This wasn’t death. This wasn’t an end. Stupidly, it felt like a conclusion.

Somehow, there was a small voice in Tommy’s mind, and the worst part was that it wasn’t the thoughts of some monster. It was the thoughts of someone who had wanted to die. A voice, soft and unsure and relieved, buried but always existing, said: *I want to live.*

It was the voice of someone stupid. Someone who should have learned their lesson a long time ago. Someone who should never trust again. It felt like something was coming apart.

Tommy leaned back, adrenaline coursing through his veins, and his mind was blurring. “I guess I believe you then.”

Wilbur shifted, his claws scraping through the leaves. “...What?”

“I believe you,” Tommy said firmly, glaring at the stars. He hated them, he hated Wilbur, but more than that he hated himself, because here he was about to make the same fucking mistake that he always did. He was going to trust someone. “I believe that you care about me. I believe that maybe we can be friends. So long as you agree that the instant you don’t care anymore, or the instant I ask you to, you’ll end me with no questions asked.”

“I promise,” Wilbur said again, and he moved closer. “Is that enough?”

Tommy shrugged one shoulder, feeling tired again. “I dunno. Maybe.”

“Maybe?” Wilbur echoed.

“It’s a magical disease, Wilbur. Fuck if I know what it wants,” Tommy groaned, thunking his head back against the tree. “Are we doing anything else here or can I go back to sleep?”

“I- sure. Do you want me to carry you back to the house?” Wilbur offered, his human eyes soft.

“Fuck you,” Tommy retorted instead, wiggling himself around so he fell onto the ground, still curled in blankets, the air fresh and cool around him. “I’m sleeping in the dirt.”

“But then I’ll have to sleep in the dirt too!” Wilbur protested, falling to the side, his face a foot away from Tommy’s. His eyes were open and pleading and Tommy thought his face had never been more punchable.

“Then suffer, prick. You’re the one that wanted to have this conversation at ass o’clock in the morning in the middle of the forest. That was your decision, not mine,” Tommy grumbled, face falling further into the blankets, and he shuffled around until nearly his entire head was covered in fabric, the world dark and warm around him with the faint calls of an owl somewhere unseen. Maybe he should be concerned about sleeping in the middle of the open in an unfamiliar forest, with wolves or bears or weird eldritch monsters or whatever stalking the place. Strange, how making a deal with the devil made those fears obsolete.

At one point though, he did peek out of the blankets, just to see what the bitch was up to. To see if he was still there. Sure enough, Wilbur was lying flat on his back, hands folded on his chest, staring up at the sky. At the movement, he turned to Tommy, and he wasn’t smiling or frowning, just looking.

Tommy wiggled out a hand to flip him off, then twisted around to face the other way, his breathing even except one small cough. His eyes closed and he tried to think of nothing, and definitely not of the person lying on the ground beside him. Someone who said they might care about him. Someone who might actually love him. Someone who would be there every time he looked for them. So close in this moment that if he were to reach out, he could touch them and know that they were real.

This was one more chance.

Tommy would give the universe one more chance to make him stay.

Maybe there was relief at not having to die.

Maybe there was panic, because he was a dumb fucking idiot who never learned.

Maybe this time would be different. He had the voice to lean on, he had a whispered promise in his mind of affection and determination that no one could fake, assuming this wasn’t all some elaborate trap. Even if it was, what did it matter? It would just be back to the first plan, to dying, because surely Tommy wanted that?

He didn’t cry. He didn’t fucking cry, because his brain was great and working and not a total piece of shit that wanted to die but didn’t want to die. That got so fucking confused. That gave people too many chances.

One last chance, given to Wilbur of all people.

One last bit of hope.

It was so fucked.

*I want to live.*



Why was it that the last thing he felt before falling asleep, was just an all encompassing relief?

-

It was dawn in the field of alliums.

A strong wind pushed and pulled at the stalks, sending them bobbing. He opened his eyes to the sky, to the way it was painted in different colours. Both his eyes were clear and free of flowers, and when he lifted a hand, the alliums let go. They carved shallow, bloody lacerations in their reluctance, but they let go. More wounds to be added to the past scars, as they slid from his skin.

He flexed his hand, turning it, and scabbed lines and dots and bloody holes were all the evidence left that something had once grown into the palm and wrist.

Then, because he could, he sat up.

The flowers tore at his shoulders, leaving injuries that stung distantly, his shirt and hair absolutely dusted in blood and pollen and petals, but he was sitting, and only meandering lines of deep seeping red marred his skin, a token protest from the weeds.

Oh. There was a forest.

He could actually see it now, and it surrounded the field in a dark tangled mess at a distance. From here, he could see the branches clacking in the wind.

From here, he could see someone standing at its edge, between the field and the woods. For a moment, they just stood there, as if looking, or searching. But then they saw him, and one hand lifted up to wave.

Confused, Tommy waved back at Wilbur, and realized something that sent a spark of fear and trepidation and eagerness through him. The thought was soft against his mind.

For the first time, he wasn't alone in the field of alliums.

-

Tommy woke up.

THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE FIC.

I was doing a dramatic and making it seem that way but I promise you it's not. Anyway, eleven chapters in and I think we might be getting somewhere.

Wilbur: hey i think i maybe sort of care about you

Tommy, visibly holding back tears: fuck you

I'll also be going on break for a bit! It'll give me a chance to restock my depleted chapter backlog and also give me a chance to focus on my other fic. In the meantime, however, I made this fic part of a series in preparation for a oneshot I've posted! It's an AU in which Tommy never met any of the monsters and he also never left that room... :) It's called [The House Rotted \(with me inside\)](#).

Tumbr [@space-anon-writes](#)

# Christening This Life With Charcoal Flecks

## Chapter Summary

Tommy sort of lives with monsters now.

## Chapter Notes

Welcome back.

We're now entering Arc II of the fic. How many arcs will there be? You don't get to know that information.

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, dehumanization, major trypophobia, body horror, mentioned cannibalism, minor injury

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up when he should be dead.

That was a weird first thought to have, but here he was, blinking his eyes open to a dawn he never thought he'd see. He was supposed to die last night. Wilbur was supposed to give up on him. Everything was sort of a bit fucked up now.

But, Tommy was the champion of nothing if not ignoring his problems and shoving everything into a box to deal with later, because he did not have the time and he did not have the patience.

Fact was, sleeping on the forest floor was actually a terrible decision in hindsight.

He realized it as he stretched and found every part of his body sore and aching, and his ears too cold from where the blanket failed to cover them. Worse was that Wilbur was camped out beside him... and snoring. Not even normal human snoring, since he had holes in its cheeks. Instead there were thirty different kinds of whistling to each inhale and exhale, and Tommy sort of wanted to do a murder.

Rather than commit a crime, he opted to do the next best thing as he carefully got himself untangled from the blankets, leaned over on a shaking arm, and stabbed a finger into the

nearest swirling hole in the stupid monster's face.

"Fuck!" Wilbur screamed, at the same time that Tommy jolted back with a shout of "Shit, that's weird!"

"What the fuck?" Wilbur demanded, horrified, a hand pressed to his cheek as he twisted around wildly to get his bearings.

"Your texture is rancid," Tommy informed him. "Fuck, even Phil's arm didn't feel this fucking weird."

"Maybe don't go sticking your fingers in my face next time," Wilbur suggested readily, voice pitched up.

"Maybe don't be a bitch next time," Tommy retorted, in the usual fashion. "Now get over here, I want to try sticking my finger in one of your holes again."

"Maybe," Wilbur said, still with a high, glass-shattering octave. "We don't word it like that."

"Word it like what?"

"How about you just refrain from touching my face altogether," Wilbur suggested instead of answering. "You're going to get weird human skin oil in my orifices."

"Maybe you shouldn't have such a fucked up texture to your orifices," Tommy said with a mocking tone. "I need to touch it again."

"No you don't."

"Yes I do!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Child!"

"Bitch!" Tommy snapped, breaking off into a cough. "I thought you said you were going to be nicer."

"I said I was going to care about you," Wilbur said, and his hands were flying forward for some reason but not touching, and Tommy realized that he was staring at the petals fluttering from his mouth.

Pointedly, Tommy forced another cough, letting petal fall onto his palm, and stared at Wilbur expectantly.

“...Is that my fault?” he asked meekly, and Tommy actively suppressed a snort and kept his face perfectly straight.

“Yes. Stop being a bitch,” Tommy retorted.

It did bring a good question to mind though. He was already coughing first thing in the morning. By the end of the day he might relapse fully again. He didn't- He wasn't sure how this worked. If a simple 'I care about you' would be enough. But Tommy actively wasn't thinking about it, about being given a reason to live, and it was dumb, and every time he thought he might be alone all he could hear was that small voice in his mind promising something close to love. Something close to being cared for.

“...You sure you still care about me?” he asked regardless, because something wasn't right, something wasn't true, and he had no idea what that was or what he would do if this was all very real. “I mean, I hope you know my sole purpose now is to antagonize the fuck out of you.”

Wilbur's claws sunk into the ground just slightly, putting shallow grooves into the soil while his shoulders drew upwards to hunch in on himself. “Is it weird to say that's part of the reason? That uh, I want to talk to you a lot? I want to hear every dumb thing that comes out of your child mouth, and be there every moment you don't fear me. I want to keep talking to you. I want to be around you. I don't know if that makes sense.”

“I think that's just friendship,” Tommy said, like Tubbo would. Stupid to the end.

Wilbur's eyes blinked. “Are we human friends?”

Tommy opened his mouth, then closed it. He wasn't in a park on the monkey bars, staring down at a boy hanging by his knees trying to do 'science'. He was looking at a monster made of honeycomb holes and flexing cuts, and yet it felt the same. “I've never had a non-human friend before.”

*‘Me neither. I guess that makes us best friends.’*

“What a sad life you must lead,” Wilbur said instead, because he wasn't Tubbo. “What a loser, spending his childhood without a single monster as a friend.”

“I mean, there were monsters,” Tommy said with a roll of his eyes, “Just not non-human ones.”

Wilbur paused, but Tommy didn't let him dissect that. Instead he clumsily pulled himself further from the blankets, trying to stand, but found that one leg was asleep and the other leg wasn't having any of his weight, ever, so he ended up not getting farther than his knees.

“Can we go places now,” Tommy complained loudly, and a part of him still expected some hit to come for whining. Yet, Wilbur was apparently allergic to touching him when he wasn't actively dying.

Slowly, Wilbur's cheeks filled up with a huff of air, before it whistled through the spiral holes. "Fine. Where do you want to go, child?"

"Breakfast, bitch," Tommy said, and there was a spike of adrenaline he tried to hide, digging his fingers into his palms so that they didn't shake. How long had it been since the last time he'd been brave enough to ask for food? He was being selfish, so selfish, but he wanted to get out of this forest because he was cold and aching, and wasn't sure if he could ever admit to himself that he wanted to go back to that cottage.

And he was hungry. His appetite had been near nothing the other day, and he still felt shaky and tired and sore, but beyond that he sort of wanted to eat food, which was a weird fucking thing to happen that he didn't know what to do with.

"Back to the house, then," Wilbur sighed. "Should I carry you again?"

Considering that Tommy's crutches were who the hell knew where and that his entire body was one big coil of aches and pains and his stamina was nonexistent, there was only one real answer to that, as much as Tommy hated it. Besides, Wilbur had been walking for quite awhile last night, and in no world could Tommy make that journey himself. "Do I look like I'm going to move? Carry me, bitch."

"I have a name," Wilbur grouched, as he came over and carefully arranged it so that he could pick up Tommy and keep him nestled in the blankets, Tommy throwing his arms around the monster's neck in a panic as suddenly he was not on solid ground and being supported by this fucker. Instead of the gentle cradled cocoon of last night, this time it was a chaotic mess of half fallen blankets, Tommy sitting up and all gangly limbs, and Wilbur trying to keep the both of them in one coherent state.

"So do I, but I don't hear you using it," Tommy snapped, strained as he tried to keep his body afloat.

"I thought humans used nicknames in human friendships?"

"I swear to god I will clart you," Tommy threatened, but then he let out a loud swear as Wilbur hefted him up further, arms probably strangling Wilbur, but in his defense the monster likely didn't need to breathe and even if he did, he could learn to deal with less oxygen.

"You were so much easier to carry when you were asleep," Wilbur hissed, starting strained steps back into the forest.

"Fuck you, I was making it easy cause I thought you were going to kill me," Tommy also hissed. "Now you get to deal with a pissed off alive human. You brought this on your fucking self." To punctuate his point, he shoved a finger back into one of the honeycomb holes and tried not to flinch at the weird ass fucking texture. His brain was torn between never experiencing it again and also keeping on doing it because it was sort of bizarre but in a needs-further-scientific-exploration way, if scientific exploration was just sticking your fingers in places they didn't belong.

Wilbur tried to thrash his head, turning it to the side, but he couldn't exactly get away from someone sitting in his arms, so he did the next best thing: he dropped Tommy.

Now, ordinarily, this would probably be a fine move and perfectly valid in the midst of battle. Tubbo used to pull the same thing on Tommy all the time. Problem was that back then Tommy could gain his breath back relatively fine on his own and go right back to trying to clart his best friend. This was not the case anymore.

Tommy yelped as Wilbur unceremoniously dropped him, the blankets cushioning a bit of the fall, but the problem was that they didn't cushion all of it, and all at once Tommy felt his breath whoosh out of his lungs.

He lay there, stunned for a moment, mouth open but not fucking sucking any air in, and his eyes were wide and panicked. One shallow, nearly nothing breath, his chest scarcely moving. Then another. Another, just a bit deeper, his head already dizzy and his mind weirdly fuzzy and distant.

Someone was touching him, he thought, trying to help him up, but Tommy was just focusing on trying to get something to budge, to inhale, as the flowers clogged up every last bit of space. The wheezing was terrible and thin and reedy, until he managed to get his chest to convulse, and something finally gave.

Tommy sucked in a breath, coughing, turning to the side even as a body was supporting him, giving his trembling muscles some relief. Fuck. Fuck okay, he was okay, it was fine it was fine he just sort of felt like absolute garbage, light headed and unfocused.

“Oh, god Tommy. Okay, there you go, you're good, you're alright, just keep doing what you're doing you're going to be okay—“

Tommy jerked an arm towards the monster, and shoved his hand against Wilbur's face, sort of hoping that he had an off button because Tommy was trying to breathe over here and the panicking was distracting and entirely unwarranted.

He couldn't speak though, didn't have quite enough oxygen for that, but he tried, through the sporadic flapping of his hand, to tell Wilbur he was fine.

“Ow.”

“You're so weak,” Wilbur whispered with astonishment. “Oh my god I almost broke you.”

“You didn't almost break me!” Tommy rasped, voice cracking, and he should not be wasting this much precious oxygen but there was no way he was going to let this prick get away with insulting him. “I'm a fuck'n... fuck'n big man, or whatever.”

“You are like a twig that I could snap in half,” Wilbur informed him while still in a higher register, dipping down so he could pick up Tommy again, this time ignoring the blankets and just going for the child, albeit a lot more gingerly. “How are you even still alive?”

“I don’t know, bitch, how am I still alive?” Tommy retorted, letting his head fall against Wilbur’s chest, still feeling dizzy. “It’s not like it’s the fault of anyone here or anything.”

“Shut up. I’m trying my best.”

“Day one of being friends and you dropped me.”

“You were sticking your finger in my holes!”

“Wow,” Tommy said slowly. “Pretty weird thing to say to a minor.”

“Oh my god,” Wilbur groaned.

“Ready to give up on me yet?” Tommy pressed, half joking.

Wilbur let out a breath, hefting Tommy up again and resuming an even pace through the forest, sunlight streaming through branches, probably closer to noon than to dawn. “No, fuck you, I signed up for this. I am your friend now. We are stuck in human friendship. I want this.”

Tommy was pretty tempted to lick him or bite him, just because he could, but that would probably taste really fucking gross first and foremost, just based on how Wilbur smelled like a stale lake. Also, yeah, Tommy might get dropped again, and the first time was already the worst, no need to rush to repeat the experience.

“You have to eat human breakfast with me then,” Tommy said instead, because he was still an asshole, and also a scientist. He sort of wanted to see if the holes in the monster’s cheeks went all the way through his face, and if soup would drip out. Also there was a pretty good chance Wilbur wouldn’t want human food in which case, sucks for him. “It’s part of human friendship.”

“I am not eating your gross soup broth,” Wilbur said haughtily. “Also, I doubt humans eat communally, considering you’ve never brought up this issue before.”

“Humans are definitely communal eaters,” Tommy lied. “Techno’s always sat and eaten with me. That’s why it hasn’t been an issue.”

“Then I’ll go get Techno to eat with you.”

“Your funeral, he told me not to bother him anymore,” Tommy said, remembering Techno’s threats from the day before. “Or maybe it’ll be my funeral. Who knows.”

“I refuse to attend one of your weird human funerals.”

They were still in the forest, following the same thin dirt trail from the day before, and Tommy, regrettably, actually found himself bored of staring at trees and moss. “Why the fuck did you take me this deep into the forest?”

“Shut up,” Wilbur said, walking faster. “It seemed like a good idea at the time. Especially before you decided to sleep on the ground like a worm.”



Tommy sort of wanted to prove how much of a worm he could be and go limp and try to slither out of Wilbur's grip, but that might result in him falling to the ground again, and as established, that wasn't a great experience.

The conversation pretty much died there, with Tommy craning his neck every now and then to see a squirrel race up a tree or a bird flutter by in a rush of movement. Wilbur kept up a steady pace with his stupidly large strides, walking the trail like he knew it by heart.

After maybe another five or ten minutes, the cottage finally came back into sight. Tommy clutched Wilbur's neck tighter as the monster shifted to leap over the cobblestone fence, and then they were in the flower section of the garden, and Tommy felt a need to commit arson.

He coughed, into his arm because he wasn't quite rude enough to get blood and petals onto Wilbur, and resentfully glared up at the attic window. He didn't want to be here, but it was this or the forest. Tommy didn't exactly have a lot of options on where to go.

Wilbur walked around the side of the house, the garden changing its focus from flowers to vegetables as he passed by the entrance to the cellar, and to the front porch of the cottage, the wicker rocking chair sitting there innocently. Inside was pretty much the same, sunlight shining in through open windows, the living room and kitchen empty of life.

"Phil!!!" Wilbur called out, kicking the door shut. "Phiiiiiiil!"

There was no response, no clicking of shoes or creaks of wire. It was quiet, and it looked like they were alone.

"Shit," Wilbur said, panicked. "He's not here."

"What do you need Phil for?" Tommy asked warily.

A pause. "I don't know how to make soup."

An open and closed mouth. "What?" Tommy said, hoarse.

"I don't know how to feed you," Wilbur admitted, voice gone a bit high pitched again. "I thought Phil would be here."

"Oh my god I'm going to die," Tommy said, and felt the vague urge to laugh.

"Shut up, you're not dying," Wilbur hissed, finally setting Tommy down on the table, walking a bit closer to the hallway as if Phil was just hiding. Then, the front door opened, and in lumbered Techno, wearing a clean skull but clothes matted with dirt instead of blood. It had a basket in its hands. "Oh thank fuck," Wilbur breathed. "Techno, how do I feed a human?"

The beast slowly swiveled to look at them both, then moved forward and set the basket on the table next to Tommy. "I have potatoes, carrots, cucumber, tomatoes, some beets, and some gourds. Take your pick, kid."

“Are you sure he can eat those?” Wilbur fretted. “It’s straight from your garden. Don’t they need to be cooked?”

Tommy, piecing it together, was starting to realize exactly why Phil had taken care of feeding him.

Techno tilted its head, poking at the vegetables with a thick claw. “...I think I remember Phil saying something about raw food making humans sick,” it observed, and Tommy stilled. What. Oh my god, what?

“Yeah, so how do we cook vegetables?” Wilbur pressed, leaning forward.

“I don’t know, I wasn’t paying attention either,” Techno huffed. “It can’t be that hard. Just put them in a pan or something.”

Four minutes later, Tommy kept an entirely neutral expression as he sat on the table swinging his feet, watching two monsters fret over the wood stove, pushing around an entire potato, carrot, and beet that just sort of sat in a pan, still with dirt on them, the slow smell of something burning permeating the air.

“Maybe it’s cooked enough?” Wilbur suggested. “It smells like a fire now. That must be a good sign?”

“I don’t know,” Techno said skeptically. “I think it has to be a bit soggy first? The vegetables in Phil’s soup were always damp.”

Tommy opened his mouth, then closed it, and decided that asking about damp vegetables wasn’t worth accidentally laughing or smiling and giving up the game. Instead he just put his head in his hands and tried to look hungry and pleading whenever either of them glanced his way, as if whatever the fuck was going on wasn’t better than food could ever be.

“Sometimes humans die from raw food,” Tommy spoke up, not technically a lie. “Also my immune system is pretty shit, so you’ll need to be extra careful.”

“Do you know how to cook, kid?” Techno asked, but it wasn’t really an accusation, more of a plea for help.

“No, Dream never taught me,” Tommy answered easily. “I wasn’t allowed in the kitchen.” He probably still wasn’t allowed, considering these monsters had never asked him to prepare his own food, but he was content to sit back and watch Wilbur poke at a fist-sized potato slowly burning on one side.

The air was noticeably thicker with smoke by the time the not-man of the hour finally showed up, its arrival signaled by the creaking of wings before it dropped onto the porch and the door opened. Tommy twisted around to see its reaction, and all he really saw was the entire thing sort of freeze up, hand on the doorknob, head pointed in the direction of the kitchen.

“Uh, the fuck are you two doing?” it asked, hat tilting back as it observed the smoke clumping along the ceiling.

“PHIL!!!” both monsters cried, turning to it in unison, backing away from the pan.

“Thank god you’re here Phil,” Wilbur breathed. “I need to feed Tommy but we’re trying not to poison him with raw food and the vegetables aren’t getting soggy enough!”

Slowly, Phil wandered over to the stove, and looked down at the pan. There was even a bit of fire in it, unremoved leaves just slowly burning to ash. It then turned, to see Tommy’s blank face from where he sat on the table.

“You’re keeping him?” it checked, head still fixed on Tommy.

“Yeah, I am,” Wilbur shot back defensively. “Now hurry up and help me keep him alive, since he refuses to be helpful.”

“Alright,” Phil said carefully, taking the pan off the burner. It pointed at the contents with a gloved finger. “See this? See what you two have done here? Bad, wrong. Don’t do it again. You’ve committed cooking crimes and I will cry. You’re also banned from ever feeding Tommy unless I’m here to supervise.”

“But Phil-“

“Mate, you set a potato on fire, that’s not normal,” Phil cut him off.

“Thought that might be wrong,” Techno mumbled, unprompted, and even Phil fell silent to watch it. “So how do we make the vegetables damp?”

Phil made a noise, like maybe it had opened whatever counted as a mouth, but didn’t say anything as its wing creaked idly. “Alright,” it declared suddenly, clapping its hands together. “Everyone shut the fuck up and gather round, I’m teaching all you little shits how to make human stew.”

Now Tommy felt it was his time to interject, and instead of trying to talk over them, he whacked his knuckles on the table, earning three monsters’ attention. “When,” he cleared his throat, rough from talking too much. “When you say human stew, uh, what meat are you putting in there?”

It suddenly occurred to Tommy that this entire time, he had never questioned what meat was going into Phil’s soups. While he’d only ever eaten the broth, objectively there were still some concerns to be hashed out, and Tommy’s stomach sort of twisted uneasily, but internally he told himself he shouldn’t be surprised.

“Ah, it’s just cow meat, mate,” Phil said, something sheepish to its voice. “Got it from the store for you. It’s not- I meant we’re making human stew as in safe-for-humans-to-eat stew, so no raw meat and shit. Don’t worry, a human friend of mine informed me of the health concerns centered around humans eating humans.”

Wilbur frowned, propping his head up on the counter with his hands. “But you can cook human meat too?”

“Don’t ask me for specifics mate,” Phil said lightly. “I just know it’s bad, and that what meat we do feed the human needs to be stored correctly. No leaving it out in the forest or in the basement, eating meat goes in the fridge.”

Well, this certainly sure was a conversation that was happening. Tommy’s trust in Phil not poisoning him admittedly was a bit shakier than it had been previously, but Tommy just resolved himself to making sure he was also around when they were making food, to help supervise, because dying from food poisoning sounded like a shit way to go.

Oh, right, he wasn’t supposed to be dying anymore, was he?

That changed something. Tommy couldn’t say exactly what, but he found himself watching Wilbur more than Phil. Wilbur’s human eyes fixated on the task at hand, blinking at extended intervals, turning from a friend to something with swirling voids in its face. An expression of curiosity, genuine enthusiasm and excitement, and nervousness.

When Phil offered it a knife, the monster took it, weird extra-jointed fingers curling too far around the handle as it tried to chop something. Approximately twenty seconds later, it was demoted to observing again after it added another cut to its mangled fingers, and Phil was forced to throw away the bloody vegetable and find another.

Tommy watched them all, but mostly watched Wilbur, and someone’s eyes could only be set on another for so long before they took notice.

Wilbur looked up, for the first time distracted from Phil’s demonstration, and stared at Tommy. Tommy, perched on the kitchen table, legs folded with his head in his arms, carefully stuck his tongue out at the monster. An experiment he didn’t know the goal of.

He watched idly as Wilbur’s expression twisted up, before it stuck its tongue out too.

It- He was smiling. Tommy stared at the tiny smile on Wilbur’s face as the monster traded insulting gestures with a teenager. Tommy sort of wondered if one of these days he’d feel like smiling back. Assuming that his days were uncountable now.

Some indeterminate amount of time and three fires after Phil had accidentally turned its back later, and two bowls were set on the table.

As usual, Phil didn’t take any for itself, remaining in the kitchen and simply watching. As usual, Techno took a heavy seat on the bench, and Tommy, still sitting on the table itself, tried to stick his foot in its food to little success.

What wasn’t as usual was Wilbur plopping himself down in Tommy’s usual spot, staring at Tommy who was balancing the bowl in his lap.

“Can I have some?” he asked, a weird half smile on his face, as if this was a scheme or trick or something. Tommy looked at that expression, and felt nothing.

“No, fuck you,” he said, and shoved big of a spoonful into his mouth, only to sputter as too-warm liquid met a too-burned throat. He coughed, someone taking the bowl from his hands, and hunched in on himself through the fit, purple petals drifting down, his chest seizing uncomfortably. There were wet petals and spat soup on the table, and without looking, Tommy flipped Techno off, because he could practically feel the bitch’s glare.

Of course, that was when he noticed that Wilbur had been the one to get the bowl out of his hands, and was currently taking a sip of Tommy’s goddamn soup with Tommy’s goddamn spoon.

“Fuck-!” Tommy said, intending to say more, but the coughing wasn’t quite over yet and his breathing wasn’t regular enough to get more words out.

Wilbur, the bitch, hummed as he stuck the spoon in his gross mouth that Tommy knew for a fact had breath that smelled like pondscum in a lake, and made a face, the honeycomb holes flexing. No soup, in fact, dripped out of the holes, which Tommy thought was a waste.

“Oh, this is actually good, Phil,” Wilbur noted with surprise, popping the spoon back out of his gross mouth. “Have you been making this the entire time? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I offered you some before,” Phil protested with a laugh. “You told me, word for word, that human food was too gross for your sensitive palate.”

“Well, obviously this isn’t normal human food!” Wilbur decided, absently letting the spoon fall back into the bowl, and yeah that was contaminated now and Tommy was not going to touch it with a ten foot pole. “You- You did something to change it up.”

“Don’t even think about it, kid,” Techno breathed, heavy against the back of Tommy’s neck, as Tommy moved to kick the bowl of soup off the table. Louder, it said, “Imagine being too good to eat human food. Cringe.”

Something warm was being shoved into Tommy’s hands between the shouting, and he blinked and looked to see that Phil had given him a different bowl and spoon, pushing the contaminated one closer to Wilbur, who took it and began eating more spoonfuls greedily.

In comparison, Tommy stirred around the broth, taking small sips when he felt like it, but mostly watching Wilbur finish off his bowl and begin to fight Techno for its portion.

When Wilbur sat back down with a huff, defeated, Tommy considered him for a moment. Then he set his bowl, still mostly full, on the table and pushed it towards him. Wilbur looked up, confused, and their eyes met again.

Carefully, Tommy stuck out his tongue.

It didn’t come as a surprise this time that Wilbur stuck out his tongue in turn.

Then, he offered Tommy a spoonful of soup.

## Chapter End Notes

Wilbur, having no idea how humans work: is this a bonding?

Yeah that's right welcome back to clown town everyone. It's okay, because the last time we got a comedy chapter was when Tommy first moved in with the monsters, and absolutely nothing fucked up happened the chapter immediately after. Surely the author wouldn't do that again.

New update schedule is once every 1-3 weeks. I don't make the rules I just live here.

ART

-[Tommy and Techno have that conversation about lungs](#)

-(Also there's fanart for the Rotted House AU oneshot that's linked in the endnotes of that fic if you're interested)

Tumblr [@space-anon-writes](#)

# Can't Fall Farther Than a Garden Wall

## Chapter Summary

Tommy asks a monster for a favour.

## Chapter Notes

Merry crisp rat

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, horror elements, body horror, gore, disturbing imagery, minor tryphobia, dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, referenced child abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy sank his fingers a little deeper into the stained fabric of Wilbur's coat, curling his hands as he tried to keep himself steady, Wilbur's arms looped around his legs to support him. He coughed, face pressed against Wilbur's back.

"You better not be getting petals on me child," the monster warned.

Really, he should have known better. Tommy's immediate reaction to such a threat was to cough harder, wincing as his chest contracted aching muscles, but it was worth it to get a smear of spit and flowers on Wilbur's precious ego.

"Fuck you," Tommy retorted, then yelped and curled his arms a little tighter, releasing Wilbur's shoulders in order to loop them around his neck instead as Wilbur suddenly jolted Tommy upwards, reestablishing his grip.

A piggyback ride into the garden certainly wasn't the most dignified form of transport, but the two of them had decided that Wilbur carrying Tommy in his arms was more trouble than it was worth. Tommy said it was because of Wilbur's weak ass bitch arms. Wilbur, in turn, blamed it on Tommy's need to embody the world's most rabid worm.

The compromise was that after breakfast, Tommy carefully clung to Wilbur's back, and was carried outside where there was sunlight and wind and bees.

“So what else do you like to do?” Wilbur asked beneath him, breath humming in his chest. “Besides go outside?”

“Uh, the fuck do you care, bitch?” Tommy retorted, aware that the list was not very long.

“Gee, I don’t know, maybe it’s because I care about you or something,” Wilbur stated dryly. “Do you have any hobbies or anything?”

“No,” Tommy said, and left it at that.

“Come on,” Wilbur whined, “you must like to do other things. Like, Techno likes to work on his collection, I like to make new songs, Phil likes to craft his projects although I don’t know where he’s moved them, so you must like to do something else besides just touch grass and sleep.”

“Maybe if someone didn’t take me on midnight field trips I wouldn’t be so tired,” Tommy replied back haughtily. “Anyway, put me down here, bitch, I want to touch grass and sleep.”

Wilbur snorted, but did as requested, and Tommy was carefully being put down near the edge of the garden, near the stone wall and the forest, but as far from the flowers as he could get. The grass was soft beneath him, tickling his feet, and Tommy made a mental note to maybe ask about getting shoes one of these days. Or perhaps not. They hadn’t given him his crutches back, so they likely wouldn’t do anything else that would increase his mobility. That was fine. Whatever.

The sun was overhead, and Tommy’s spot on the grass was open to it. He blinked, because it was warm, and wondered when he’d gotten so used to being cold.

Wilbur settled himself down as well, a few feet from Tommy, and his too-many jointed fingers began to idly pick at the grass. Tommy watched him for a few minutes, but found that with the way the sun was warm on his face, his eyes were half closed already. Huh. He might actually just sleep.

He closed his eyes, reclining back and laying down, curling to the side to let out a content breath, only one cough wracking through his frame. His breathing evened after, and for countless moments, Tommy dozed.

It wasn’t really sleep. He kept coming to every now and then, just aware enough to see a bird fly by or to notice Wilbur shift, but for the most part it was quiet, and Tommy drifted.

“You’re very boring,” Wilbur informed him eloquently, and Tommy made a disgruntled sound, but his limbs were too heavy to bother flipping him off. His stupid voice made Tommy become a little more awake again, which was unacceptable.

“Wow. Maybe you should just kill me then,” Tommy said flatly, because if Wilbur didn’t like this side of him, then he shouldn’t have even bothered in the first place. As much as Tommy hated to admit it, this was closer to his norm of the last few months than being annoying and insulting monsters had ever been. Back in his room in the house with Dream, he’d spent countless days and hours just sleeping or resting or staring at a wall, barely having the energy



to leave his room even if he'd wanted to. That shaky journey from Bad's house to the forest had been an exception fueled by adrenaline and desperation, but now that motivation had long dissipated, and this was what was left. This was a Tommy that wasn't actively trying to die, just waiting to instead.

"Don't tempt me," Wilbur grumbled, and Tommy didn't bother trying to ponder the sincerity of that statement. "Are you really just going to lie here in the yard all day?"

"Is there something else I should be doing?"

Wilbur huffed, puffing out his cheeks with air. "It's more like I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm just sort of sitting here. Do you feel cared about?"

Tommy blinked his eyes open, glaring while squinting in the sunlight. "Why are you asking me? Do you feel like you care?"

"I want to help you," Wilbur stated plainly, which, gross. It was one thing to be talked about in the forest at night with no one else to witness, but here in the garden in the sunlight Tommy sort of wanted to die inside. "Is there anything you want? I'll get you anything."

Tommy stiffened. "Anything?"

"Anything."

This was a trap. This was the most obvious fucking trap Tommy ever had the displeasure of witnessing. Yeah, alright, Tommy had one thing that had sort of been on his mind this whole time, but asking for it would probably be the worst idea ever. It always went bad with Dream... Then again, this wasn't Dream.

"Dream didn't like me asking for shit," Tommy said flatly, because he needed to hear Wilbur say it. For there to be at least a little bit of a promise that this wouldn't go to shit. That asking wouldn't make it worse.

Wilbur's grin was predictable. "I'm not Dream. Ask me for anything." *I'll never be like them.*

The words weighed heavy, and fuck it, what did Tommy really have to lose at this point? Just his life, he supposed, but surely it wouldn't be that easy. "Can I have my crutches back?" he asked plainly, and waited for it to get worse. Waited for a denial or an accusation or a closet to be locked in, for his own good, so he didn't wander away, so he didn't escape. Wilbur said he wouldn't be like Dream. Tommy waited for him to change his mind.

"Your crutches?" That was all the monster said.

"Yeah," Tommy mumbled, trying to play it casual, trying to pretend that a part of his brain wasn't already shut down with the inevitable. It wouldn't be this easy. He'd never get them back. The monster would never give him the chance to leave. "I had them with me when I went into the forest, but they're gone now. I kinda need them to walk with. Can I have them back?"

Two human eyes stared at him. Then, Tommy realized that the monster's face was more pink than he'd last seen it. "Oh," Wilbur said. "Oh, have you needed them this entire time?"

Tommy had no idea what wavelength this fucker was on. "Uh, yeah? I need them to walk. Isn't that why you took them?"

Wilbur opened his mouth, then closed it. "Fuck," he whispered, then suddenly he was on his feet. "Fuck, I totally forgot about them. I think they're still in the forest somewhere."

Tommy balked. "You just left them?!"

"I was a little distracted by your untimely demise!" Wilbur protested, throwing his hands up. "Why didn't you say anything sooner?"

"Why the fuck would I have?" Tommy demanded instead.

"Fuck, okay, I'll go get them now. You stay here I'll be right back," Wilbur grouched, and he was leaving, fence gate open, not even listening to Tommy's shouts of "Hey! Wait, don't just leave me- fuck." Wilbur was gone.

Tommy was alone. In the garden. Without his main mode of transport. "Goddamnit," he grumbled, sitting up and throwing his hands to his face. "I'm stuck in human friendship with an idiot."

Technically being stranded in the garden wasn't the end of the world, but unlike a few days ago, Tommy definitely didn't have the strength or stamina to try to get inside by himself. Yesterday had taken a lot out of him, and as he sat there, he could still feel the tremors in his hands from where they were raised to his face.

Unlike a few days ago, Tommy was also completely alone.

He ripped up a bit of grass in frustration, but ended up just sort of lying back down again, a bug crawling across his hand. The sun was warm, but there were a few clouds drifting by now, so that warmth was conditional. Tommy scowled, and refused to admit, in any capacity, that he sort of wished Wilbur would've stayed here with him, or at least have taken him along.

He closed his eyes and curled up, attempting to rest again. This time though, when his sleep was interrupted, when something made a noise or his mind decided to stir, there was no lethargic return. Instead he'd be awake, alert, and all at once his brain would realize he was still alone, and something would twist inside him.

Unsurprisingly, the thing that most frequently interrupted his nap quickly became the coughing.

Tommy scowled the fourth time it happened, a loud, heaving fit that had him sitting up, blood flecking his lips. He knew the disease wouldn't magically be cured. He'd had it most of his life, he didn't expect it to just go away he just... just thought it'd get better.

For every minute longer that Wilbur didn't return, something curled a little tighter, grew a little more, and Tommy stubbornly ignored it, because it wasn't like Wilbur had left him on purpose. The monster was getting his crutches. He was helping Tommy. He cared. Cared except he couldn't be bothered to bring Tommy along or check that he'd be okay before leaving, not that Tommy needed someone to do that.

Just... fuck.

At some point, around the one or two hour mark, Tommy gave up on sleep altogether. He didn't actually know how long it had been, but the sun had moved significantly, and Wilbur hadn't returned.

He didn't... forget about Tommy, did he? That would be... that would be dumb. He wouldn't just forget.

Except everyone else did, Tommy knew. Sapnap, George, Bad, Tubbo... they all forgot about him. He was so easy to forget.

The next fit was harsh and violent, and Tommy grimaced through it, head dizzy and chest aching, and fell back onto the grass again-

-only to immediately sit back up when the door to the cottage opened.

For a moment, both him and Phil just stared at each other, the not-man unmoving besides the swaying of its clothes in the breeze. Then it drifted forward, down the steps with a *click click click*, to Tommy, hands folded in its sleeves serenely.

Unprompted, it took a seat beside him, leaving more distance than Wilbur had.

"I thought Wilbur was out here with you," it said, veil tilting.

"He left," Tommy told it.

It waited, as if Tommy would say something more, before asking, "Was there a reason?"

He shrugged, fingers picking at the grass, purposefully not looking at the monster beside him, gut uneasy. "He went to go find my crutches. You guys left them in the forest, dickheads."

There was another lengthy pause. "How long ago did he leave?"

"I dunno, a few hours maybe?" he mumbled.

"Mate," it said, something strained to its voice. "He got lost."

Tommy blinked. "Pardon?"

There was something, an actual chuckle, as it stood back up. "He probably got lost trying to find them. Chances are it'll take him all day, maybe all night."

“I- You guys literally live in the forest,” Tommy said, mind blank. “How the fuck do you get lost? I left them pretty close to town on an animal trail that led from my house, it’s not that hard.”

Phil just hummed, wings shaking themselves out with rusted groans from beneath its robes. “Most of us don’t navigate like you do. We don’t need to rely on landmarks but instead on instincts that lead us to places and people and things that are important.”

“My crutches are important,” Tommy protested.

“Maybe to you, but not to him,” it said easily. “I can go look for them instead if you like, I should be able to find them. You could also come with me, if you want.”

Tommy stared for a moment. “Aren’t you going to fly?”

“I can take a passenger,” it said, again, with far too much ease.

The gears in Tommy’s head were turning. “You’re going to murder me, aren’t you? If you’re going to drop me from the sky at least tell me first. Also, fuck you for waiting this long.” He very adamantly ignored the panic, the disappointment, that stirred in his gut. He wanted to live. Fuck, of course death would find him now.

“I won’t drop you, mate,” it said. A voice, in Tommy’s mind: *I’m not going to drop you. That’s not the point of this.* “Wilbur wants to keep you, I wouldn’t do that to him.”

Alright, so it was telling the truth. Of course it only cared about Wilbur though. It’s not like Tommy had forgotten about what it’d said to him yesterday, about how it didn’t want to care. Whatever, Tommy could work with what he got.

He got to his feet, using the stone wall to brace himself, glaring at Phil. “Now what?”

In response, it turned around and crouched down, so that Tommy could climb on its back.

“For the record,” he said, as he carefully set his hands on its shoulders, grimacing and readjusting his grip until he felt more metal mesh underneath and less clumps. “This is the sketchiest fucking thing I’ve ever had the displeasure of doing.”

“Noted,” it said, and fuck that, it was totally grinning.

Tommy scowled, looping his arms around its neck, subtly ready to choke out a monster if it gave him a reason to, and his breath hitched as he was picked up, arms looped around his legs. His body was fit between the wings, the metal brushing his sides as it expanded, dark substance dangling from the mesh like wilted black feathers.

The metal suddenly beat down, snapping open and slamming against the ground, and Tommy let out an ungodly gurgle as he clung tighter, feeling their bodies rise into the fucking sky. It was one thing to see a magical monster defy the laws of physics, but it was an entire different thing to be a normal ass human defying the laws of physics.

They rose up higher, over the sprawling forest, and Tommy noted, something sinking in his gut, that forest was all he could see, uninterrupted except for the little cottage beneath them. The town was nowhere in sight. Probably better not to dwell on just how isolated and trapped he was.

“Your wings are shit,” Tommy told it, and his voice was only reed thin because the oxygen was thinner up here. Not technically a lie, Tommy could already feel himself shallowing out his breathing.

“I’ll take that into consideration next time I make new wings,” it mused. “I’m thinking of adding a little more flesh to them.”

“Oh, finally going to patch the holes?” Tommy retorted, even as his stomach churned.

“Fuck off, the holes are an artistic choice. It adds to the fear factor.”

“It adds to the bitch factor. You’re a tool.”

The thing shuddered beneath him, and Tommy subtly tightened his grip, realizing that it was laughing, but also sort of hoping not to fall from the skies.

“For someone that wanted me to let them fall to their death, you’re trying very hard not to die,” it noted, because of course it did.

“Yeah, well, Wilbur wants me to live,” Tommy muttered. “So here I am I guess.”

“I could probably still drop you, if you wanted,” it said, and Tommy felt his heart pick up, but he didn’t bother entertaining it.

“Was that an option this whole fucking time?” he demanded. “No, shut up, stop laughing. Why the fuck couldn’t you have just done this to start with? All I had to do was ask? Are you for real? What the fuck!”

“I’m kidding, mate,” it said, dipping a little lower over the forest. Now that Tommy was paying attention and not squeezing his eyes shut, he could see a countless sprawl of trees beneath them, zipping past. Nothing but green foliage in all directions, as if he and Phil were the only things alive. “No, I still can’t kill you. Even if I could and you asked, I might not have dropped you though. There’s many more unpleasant ways I like to kill.” *You could be another body in the trees. You could be another art display.*

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Yeah yeah, big monster will give me big scary death. Until I see it happen I’m not even going to bother being impressed.”

The thing hummed beneath him, slipping a bit lower in the sky and finally the town was in view. Tommy blinked, picking out Dream’s house from this unfamiliar angle, and watching as Phil lined itself up with it, dropping into the trees less than half a mile from it.

Tommy yelped, pressing closer as leaves whipped by, something cutting his skin, and then they were touching down onto the forest floor. More than that, they were standing on a thin

winding animal trail, and Phil didn't bother putting him down before beginning to walk along it.

"So..." Tommy said after a minute. "Do you actually know where my crutches are or are you just following my directions?"

"Shut," it snapped, fingers tightening around his legs. "It's not exactly easy to find two wooden sticks in a forest."

Tommy wanted to protest, because his crutches certainly weren't sticks, but... the difference probably didn't matter to them. Phil had already said that they weren't important. To the monsters, the crutches were just some silly thing he'd asked for, nothing of real note, easy enough to leave behind.

For Tommy though... the crutches were an independence given and taken in a damning eternal game. They were his key to being able to walk on his own again, of feeling somewhat normal, and instead they were treated as insignificant.

Though... they probably were. It's not like Tommy was much more significant himself.

"Ah, there they are," Phil said, pleased, and Tommy blinked, because he really hadn't made it far, had he?

Indeed, his crutches were lying haphazardly on the animal trail, half in the bushes. Just... sitting there in a clump. Fuck these monsters.

Phil carried him over to them and stooped to pick them up, tucking them under its arms alongside Tommy's legs, so the sharp edges of the wood bit into his skin, but he was far from complaining. "Did you leave anything else while we're here?" it mused, turning its head slightly back towards him.

"The last of my braincells," Tommy retorted. "May they rest in fucking peace, unlike me."

Phil hummed and then the wings were stretching out again, shrieking with metal, and Tommy brace himself as they beat down and the foliage was whipping and cutting at his face. They burst out of the forest, staying low over the trees, and he allowed himself one moment to glance behind him. From above, it was impossible to spot that little weaving animal trail, but Tommy tried to picture it anyway.

In a different world, walking it should have killed him. He should have followed that honeycomb monster the first day he met it, and wandered until nothing of him remained, even if his leg splintered and fractured and even if his lungs devoured him from the inside. Instead he walked it three days later, and that was enough to change everything.

But... he wasn't supposed to be thinking like this anymore.

He buried his face in his elbow as the coughing came, trying not to get blood on Phil, considering the monster was currently holding his life in its hands. A life that was,

apparently, somehow precious again. Still, the hacking was harsh, spasming his chest, and a painful ache returned even after he slumped, tired and wheezing in breaths.

“That cough sounds rough, mate,” Phil noted, and Tommy tried not to tense too much.

“Yeah, well, it always is,” he muttered, and left it at that, his arms tight around the monster’s neck.

The late afternoon sun was over them when the cottage came back into view. It was in a small clearing of trees, quaint with a curl of smoke from its chimney and the sprawling gardens around it. It really did look like it was from a fairytale, but the kind that ended grimly.

Phil dropped down easily, even as something plunged in Tommy’s stomach at the motion, and the next thing he knew he was being let down onto the grass in the same spot he’d started, but this time with crutches in tow. He absolutely did not waste any time taking advantage of that.

He was shaky and still a bit wheezy from the thinner air, but the smooth motion of slipping the crutches beneath his arms made his chest sort of fluttery. It wasn’t the most stable, standing in the grass, but he was upright and his leg was off the ground and all of this was under his own effort, and that’s all that really mattered.

“Thanks,” he muttered, and tried to pretend that he didn’t hate how this was the monster who’d done him the favour.

“It’s no problem, mate,” the monster said, and it had taken the time to settle itself on the stone garden wall. One leg drawn up, leaning on it idly, the veil around its hat drifting slightly in the breeze. From this vantage, its eyeline was even with Tommy’s, if not a bit taller.

“Cool,” Tommy said, and he turned to, well, he wasn’t sure yet. Maybe go inside. Maybe do some laps around the house. Maybe trample some flowers.

Instead, Phil stopped him. “Wilbur said he was keeping you, then?”

Right, Tommy had been getting bad vibes for awhile now, but something in his mind stiffened, as he turned back to face the monster. “Yeah, he literally told you that this morning.”

“Mmm,” Phil hummed noncommittally. “And you agreed?”

Tommy shrugged, feeling the way the crutches caught under his arms. “Not sure what else I’m supposed to do.”

“You could have said no,” Phil answered. “You could have ended it.”

Tommy’s breath caught, but he forced his way through, forced himself to keep standing and glaring. Fuck, alright, whatever, this was fine. “Yeah but I didn’t. I agreed to live. Me ‘n Wilbur are... are bonded now or whatever. Honestly not sure how that’s any of your concern.”

“It’s entirely my concern,” it responded, and it couldn’t be accidental, the way it towered over him. The way its wings were half extended, dripping with dark substance and screaming with sharp metal ends. “You’re going to die.”

“Oh my god,” Tommy groaned, and balanced his crutches against himself so he could rub at his face. “I literally just told you I was going to live.”

“You did,” it said. “But that’s a lie. You won’t live, will you?”

“You cryptic motherfucker,” Tommy muttered beneath his breath. “It’s going to be this conversation that fucking kills me. What do you even want?”

He didn’t see it, not until it had already happened. There was a hand resting on his shoulder, maybe human, for a moment. But there was no glove to cover it this time, to disguise the vicious bite of metal into his skin between his shirt collar and his neck, and the way ragged, scratchy fingernails—too many of them and too layered—grazed by his throat. It pulled him in, until there was nowhere to go and nothing to look at but the thin net veil and the silhouette of something beyond it.

This close, he could smell it. Underneath the usual scent of metal and oil and nutmeg, was a deeper stench of something rotting, light, like it was old and layered with perfume.

“I want to know that you’re actually going to try,” it crooned, soft, next to his ear. “I want to know that you want to live, that you’re not going to die on him.” *I won’t let you hurt him.*

Oh, so that’s what this was about. Tommy ignored whatever feeling was tight in his chest, that squeezed and wanted to leave him breathless. He tried to push away, and failing that, tried to get the arm to let him go, but even then, just grabbing on, he knew that the monster wouldn’t move unless it wanted to. Especially not to him, to something so thin and trembling.

“It’s not up to me, dickhead,” he hissed, and his fingers were digging into its wrist, but that was nothing compared to the cracked nails scratching against his throat. “It’s a magical fucking disease.”

“That’s a lie though, isn’t it?” it said, and it was close. “It is your decision. You get to choose whether you live or die.”

“I don’t—”

“You do,” it countered. “The hanahaki always responds to you. Ultimately it is your choice. I’m here to make sure that you take that choice seriously. That you’re not leading Wilbur on.”

“And what,” Tommy bit out, “are you going to do about it if I am?”

The not-man never let him go. It was so much more looming, perched on the stone fence, the grating of something metal in its feet clinging to the rocks. He couldn’t see its hand—he’d never seen it—but he could feel the way it layered on long and bitten fingernails alongside metal ends, a mockery of how a human should be, with just a guess of how many fingers they should possess.



Slowly, was the way it reached up and pulled back the veil, but by that moment Tommy's heart might as well have already stopped.

It was a buzz of adrenaline that flooded his veins, that caused him to shake, that made him near buckle as his crutches fell away but he couldn't even feel his leg beyond the ever-gripping terror that sunk into his mind, that made his eyes wide, that made it impossible to breathe so that all that was left to circulate was the need to run run run, please-!

But it was just a face.

A human visage that was not quite human, that left swirling afterimages on his eyelids when he blinked, that set off every bit of instinctual fear left within him. It should be human, but along the edges of one jaw the skin sloughed off where it was discolored, and the wire mesh was seen beneath like the skeleton of a sculpture. When he stared too long at the eyes, he could see how they were dulled and glazed, and the flash of metal clamps in the corners keeping them there. The way the lips didn't move quite right, too stiff and pale, just a puppet to the thing wearing skin that wasn't its own.

"Tommy," it said, and fuck fuck fuck his name was on its lips and he knew what that meant, he new the way the it might wear him one day, sew him apart and sew him together- "I don't think you want to know the answer to that."

A thumb ran over his cheek, trailing three ragged nails against his skin. His breath hitched, and somewhere in the panic, he thought it might be a scalpel ready to peel him open.

"There are so many things I could do."

He squeezed his eyes shut, but that just made the images all the more vivid. He remembered that night in the forest, asking for death, and the little voice in his mind had laid out all the options. He could fall- He could fall and scream as wind tore him to threads and he could land in one big mess with everything shattered at once, or he could be food for crows with little beaks piercing him and pulling out his tendons like worms until his limbs were slack and he couldn't run, or it could string him together and slip wire against his bones until he looked human enough with nothing inside-

The memory of the first night he saw the not-man was tarnished and warped, the face seen beneath the porchlight a moment before it broke stretched out and unraveled and unmade, and that had just been a flash of grisly details seen at a distance. Here- Here there was nothing to protect him from the way that the fear bled like cold wire into his arteries and caused his fingers to shake and tremble, watching the way the monster's eye didn't shift and the way little staples lined the edges of its face and all he could do was stutter out his breath and know that he would be the next thing worn by- by- by-

But it was just a face.

It was just a face, and Tommy didn't forget what artificial fear felt like. It flooded his senses and shook him to the bone, but it wasn't even fucking him. He forced one breath, then another, with fingers tight around the wrist that held him there, and glared, even as a part of him flinched and trembled and wanted to run but knew he couldn't-

“Can you—fuck’n—turn that off, please?” he hissed, and nearly bit his tongue for it.

The thing blinked... maybe. The eyes twitched within the allowances of the metal clamps.  
“...What?”

“The stupid-“ Tommy heaved in another breath, trying not to let his legs buckle. His brain felt scrambled to hell and back and he knew he’d probably get a headache. His teeth felt like they were going to crack from how hard he grinded them together, to get his body to fucking cooperate. “-fear thing. Can you turn that off? I can’t fucking think.”

“If you’re afraid,” it said slowly, tightly. “It’s because you should be.”

“No, it’s because you’re a dick!” Tommy snapped, forcing his legs to obey, letting the pain ground him enough to stand up a bit straighter. Fuck, his crutches were on the ground now, and he thought up a silent apology to them. “You did this when you came to my house. You’re projecting your- your stupid fucking fear thing. Like- Like Wilbur’s bitchass enthrallment.”

Almost unnoticeably, the hand cupping his face, his neck, his cheek, loosened just slightly. “Your fear is your own,” it said, but it sounded less certain about that.

“Oh my fucking god,” Tommy groaned, and fuck his lungs hurt. They were aching from the effort it took to breathe, even as the buzz in his veins managed to die a bit. Thinking was a bitch and a half, but Tommy thought back to the enthrallment. The way it faded. The way it was a pressure, but feather-light. He tried to separate his thoughts from the cries of *terror-run-fear* going through his mind, assigned it to be a voice in his head. “If you want me to believe that than you can at least be fuck’n subtle about it. Every time you do spooky shit my brain and body loses its mind, it’s the worst. Turn it off.”

And it was fading, slowly, then the arm drew back completely. There wasn’t really a corresponding expression in the not-man’s face, mostly because the skin looked too stiff to move right, but it didn’t matter when it let the veil flutter back over it.

All at once the fear cut off completely, and Tommy was on the ground on his knees forcing his stupid lungs to breathe. He coughed horribly, an awful ache, tired and exhausted after the rush of adrenaline. God, Phil was the fucking worst.

“How did you know I was doing that?” Phil asked with a tilt of its hat, sitting on the garden wall, nearly relaxed, if it wasn’t leaning forward to peer down at Tommy.

Tommy flipped it off, resigning to the fact that he needed to sit down now, his crutches scattered around him. “You mean besides the fact that you make it obvious as hell? I’m not an idiot, Phil.”

Its head tilted further. “That’s not really a reason.”

“Fuck you, figure it out yourself,” Tommy hissed. “Are you fucking done with your shovel talk now?”

“Shovel talk?” it echoed.

“Yeah, you’re threatening me so I won’t hurt Wilbur or whatever,” Tommy clarified. He wished he could get up to be on eye level with the thing, but his lungs were still cramping and there was a dizzying headache pounding in his skull. “Not that any of your threats were particularly effective.”

“Mate,” it said lightly, that same edge undertowing its voice. “I’m not lying about my threats.”

“Sure,” Tommy said, legs crossed in the grass, hunched in on himself. “You just didn’t think them through. How exactly do you expect to kill me horrifically for hurting Wilbur if I’m already dead? And sure, maybe you can try and kill me before that happens or whatever, but then Wilbur’s still going to be devastated.”

“I’ll make it seem like you ran away,” Phil promised. “He’ll never know what became of you.”

“Cool,” Tommy said. “He’s still going to be sad. If you hurt me, then you’re just hurting him.”

“Tommy, I could hurt you in so many ways that wouldn’t hurt him,” the not-man said carefully.

“And none of them will guarantee I’ll listen to you,” Tommy retorted. “Face it Phil, either I’ll live or die and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it, but trust that maybe I do actually want to fucking live. Or not. It’s not really my problem.”

Tommy leaned forward, arms wrapped around himself, glaring at the thing on the wall.

“Better yet,” he said slowly. “It’s not your fucking problem either.”

There was a bit of a colder breeze right now, and it was just the two of them, so close to the forest’s edge.

Finally, the monster broke its stillness, joints creaking as it reached an arm forward. Tommy remained perfectly still and unflinching, even as the fingernails dragged against his cheek again.

“You really aren’t scared, are you?” it mused, and its touch was feather-light.

Tommy didn’t know if that was true or not.

Fear was... weird, now. He was scared in this moment, he wouldn’t deny that. There was a pounding to his heart and a scattering in his mind wondering if this was it, if he’d die now, if he’d die on Wilbur. He was also scared of Phil, but only from associating the monster with the burning of the inhaler shoved against his lips, scalding him from within. The pain of being forced to live another day.

The thing was, Tommy knew what it was like to be terrified. To be so scared he couldn't breathe or move, curled in and hoping and praying that everything would be okay. Compared to that, these little trickles of fear were laughable, were easy to brush by, to ignore. Besides, they were distant. He could feel scared, but it wasn't present, wasn't connecting with him. That was probably the biggest give away of Phil's artificial fear: it tried to be real and genuine and all encompassing, but it was all just symptoms. It was as vivid as a movie on a high definition screen with surround sound, but all Tommy had to do was blink and look away, and suddenly the fear was just pixels. Fractured and broken pixels.

Fact was, Phil probably could hurt him. Could terrify him until there was nothing left. Could snap the connections in his brain and finally break him completely. Finish what Dream had started. The only reason it wouldn't was because that would be counterproductive to everything it was trying to do. If Tommy had to go through it all again, if he had to endure a second Dream, then there really was no point in staying here and breathing, no reason in trying to stay alive.

He thought of Wilbur, of lying beside him, of turning his head and seeing someone else there. He thought of the promise. Wilbur... Wilbur was the reason, the only reason, to keep living.

*'I don't know if I'm good enough to be a reason.'*

Slowly, the hand withdrew from his cheek and the creature stepped off the wall, landing in the soft grass with its mangled wings tangling around it. Here, with the long sleeves of its robes to hide its hands and the veil to hide its face, it could just be a person. Tommy, at this point, knew better than to think that.

It took a few paces, but stopped, and even off the wall it still loomed over Tommy, who was content to stay seated on the lawn while the ache in his chest faded.

For a moment, they just stared at each other, and Tommy vaguely entertained the idea of trying to ram it in the shins with his crutches.

"I'll see you tomorrow," it said finally, and it was probably a threat and a promise all in one, but Tommy was done with feeling scared today.

"Fuck off," he hissed instead, and watched the monster as it strode past, near floating, barely touching the tips of the grass as it ascended to the porch and went inside with its dumb *click click*. Then... it was just Tommy, alone in the garden by a crumbling stone hedge, his crutches around him like broken wings.

Carefully, he propped himself up against the wall, promising that he'd get to his feet once he felt better, once there wasn't still a tremble in his fingertips and in his legs. When it wasn't an effort to breathe again.

Sitting here, he felt it. An accumulation in his throat, until he was forced to curl forward and cough, loud and painful, into his palm. His chest seized, sore with a sharp ache like a razorblade digging in. When he blinked, there were petals, purple and bloodied, but more damningly, they were clumped thickly in his palm, as thick as they were in the space of his lungs.

Tommy could swear he felt eyes boring into him, so carefully he wiped the petals into the grass. And, if he curled up after with his head in his arms to wait for Wilbur to get back so he could put off going back inside, then that was his business.

He tried to pretend, like he used to, that things weren't going to get worse.

## Chapter End Notes

Phil: I am threatening you

Tommy: pay me ten dollars

Phil: what

Tommy: pay me ten dollars and then i'll feel threatened

Phil, rooting through his wallet: do you take monopoly money

Merry cringlesmash have some uhhhhh disturbing imagery and horror i guess idk i just work here

Tumblr [@space-anon-writes](#)

# Safety is Fleeting / Yet I Stay

## Chapter Summary

Tommy and Wilbur flex their expert communication skills.

## Chapter Notes

Updates are going to take longer on account of All the Things That Went Down over the Holidays plus my new course load, but I'll strive to update at least once a month, as like a personal goal to treat myself, because I deserve it.

Anyway this chapter was written at 2AM when brain was going brrrr and I've been thinking about it ever since.

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, referenced past child abuse, body horror, blood, major trypophobia warning (rip), dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, dehumanization, derealization, disassociation, and I know we don't talk about this, but if you ever need like, a chapter summary or clarifications about a warning, just let me know

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Hey.”

Tommy cracked his eyes open, first taking in the darkness, and then the bone deep ache. The air was cold and his skin was cold, and the voice that spoke was warm.

He craned his neck upwards, sharp rocks digging into his back from where his body was propped up against the garden wall, to see Wilbur standing over him, the iron gate left open. The monster had on a pensive expression, guilty almost, as he crouched down so that they were closer.

Tommy stretched, getting rid of the last dredges of a nap he didn't remember taking, and noted that half the sky was dark while the rest housed only the faint red highlights of a rapidly fading sun. It was evening, then. One more evening than he was ever meant to see.

“Hey,” Tommy muttered back, his voice rough from sleep and cold, and he paused briefly to cough into his arm. “Did you get lost, bitch?”

To his surprise, Wilbur's face only grimaced more as he ran a shaky hand through his hair. "I, um. I didn't find your crutches."

Tommy blinked. "What?"

"I didn't find your crutches," Wilbur admitted, tugging at his hair. "I was looking and now it's dark and I don't- I have no idea where they are, I couldn't find them. Fuck, I'm- I'm so fucking sorry. I'll look again tomorrow."

Tommy blinked at him, very slowly and languidly, and then he carefully supported himself on the stone wall as he stood, and Wilbur raised to meet him. One of Tommy's legs was asleep. "Oh. Alright. I'm going to bed then."

"Oh, yeah, of course," Wilbur agreed quickly. "Do you want me to carry you-" He stopped, watching as Tommy stooped down to pick his crutches up out of the grass, securing them beneath his arms. "What."

"Phil helped me find them earlier," Tommy explained, steadying himself and trying to wake up his sleeping leg, because that was his non-injured leg dammit, it couldn't be slacking off. "But you can look for them in the morning if you want. Doesn't matter to me."

"Oh. Phil did. Um. Okay."

"Goodnight," Tommy called back, rolling his eyes and beginning the journey back to the house, although it wasn't much of a journey anymore. He was stiff and sore and cold from falling asleep outside, but even with bad coordination he guided himself near smoothly down the path under his own doing, and fiddled with the door into the cottage.

Warm air engulfed him instantly, and he felt no remorse about closing the door behind him, not even bothering to turn around to see the image of Wilbur, standing alone and confused, in the dark.

Tommy wasn't upset with Wilbur, he was just... disappointed. Maybe. He shouldn't be though. He shouldn't be feeling a brief satisfaction, curled heavy and sated in his gut.

He took a moment to pause and cough into his arm again, wiping the flower petals on his pantleg.

There was no one downstairs, and when Tommy listened, he couldn't hear anyone either. The house was empty, with embers burning in the wood stove and a lantern on the table to give a soft and faint glow, making the shadows long on the walls.

A small bowl of soup with a spoon beside it sat on the table, untouched and cold. Tommy left it that way, heading for the ladder to the attic.

Which. Mmm.

He sort of just... chucked his crutches up there? One at a time, and it took multiple attempts, but finally he got them to stay, and then he was putting weight on his right leg with a wince,

arms wrapped tight around the rungs, carefully exhaling a strained breath as he hoisted himself up. A slow, arduous process, but he did it all the same.

The attic was empty and quiet like the downstairs had been, but somebody had also left a lit lantern up here, so there was at least light to see by. Tommy pushed his crutches out of the way, taking the trembling steps to his bed on his own, but paused when he got there. A blanket lay strewn over the mattress, but he realized, with a twisting feeling, that the rest were sitting out in the forest somewhere, like his crutches had been. Forgotten by fucking Wilbur.

The cough that came next was a coincidence and didn't mean a damn thing.

He got into bed, cold, and blew the lantern out and wrapped himself up in the one blanket left, too small, and assured himself it was enough. Even one had been a luxury in Dream's house, and Tommy couldn't count the number of times he'd have no blankets at all, or the number of times he hadn't even been able to spend the night in his bed, locked away somewhere else. The floor had been as easy a place to fall asleep on as any.

At least here, in the attic, he could see the faint outline of the walls and furniture far from his face, and not closed in like the coats in the closet that had brushed his nose. At least here, he could fucking breathe, even if the air was cold and his inhales were shaky and raspy.

But-

But the attic was too quiet.

It was just his breathing, and the gentle creak of the house settling, and nothing but the soft sound his fingers made when they scraped against the blanket. It was only him up here, and the attic was quiet.

Tommy had wanted this. Had wanted to be alone, but he was finding out as more and more time passed, the exact extent of that decision. Of having too much time and too many fucked up things to think about, and no patience to process any of it. Not to mention all the fucking coughing.

He was fine. He was going to live, even if it was a bitch to do so.

A cough seized his chest again, but he tried to keep it muffled. Still, the spasm progressed, and at that point he gave up on sleep altogether and instead sat up with his knees drawn to his chest, so he could let out heavy, laboured hacking into his arm.

Outside, crickets made their presence known beyond the drawn curtains and shut window, but inside it was just Tommy.

He drew in a wheezing, measured breath, fingers fisted in the blankets, and wondered if he was going to fuck this all up after all.

Nothing was really getting better.



Sure, the hanahaki wasn't progressing as fast, but it was there, and Tommy's lungs were getting worse, and none of this was going to be enough, was it? Maybe it could be. Maybe he could try a little harder. But he- he already sort of wanted to live now. Why couldn't that just be enough?

Why couldn't... Why couldn't having Wilbur just be enough?

*'I don't know if I'm good enough to be a reason.'*

And Tommy- Tommy knew that Wilbur cared. He knew that! He had too. The voice in all its whispered affection was painfully, gratefully real. Wilbur cared. Wilbur had promised. Everything was okay now but that didn't mean that any of this was good enough! It didn't mean the monster would still- still care enough. But- Fuck! Tommy shouldn't be so selfish as to need that much care to begin with.

It felt like his mind was fucking spiraling, and instead of the promise *I care about you*, instead of the promise *I'll be your reason*, there was just the thought, the one, simple thought, that Wilbur had left him alone in that garden.

He didn't... the monster didn't mean it, Tommy knew that! He knew that Wilbur was trying to help him, that it'd gone to get his crutches but... but... but it'd left him all the same. He left Tommy alone all the same.

(And Tommy was so fucking tired of listening to his own breathing and no one else's.)

A-And it wasn't like Wilbur was now Tommy's companion for life! Wilbur had his own things to do and his own time to spend and it was- it was selfish to want to take up more time than was given.

Wilbur cared, it just... it just might not be enough, and Tommy didn't want to admit, head pressed against his knees, that he sort of felt fear now, finally. He'd been living with monsters for so long, and only now was he scared of not living with them anymore.

The next coughing fit, as common as they were, was harsher than the rest. Tommy felt it when his air cut off completely for just a moment before he could cough again, chest spasming, until a mass of petals splattered onto his hand and he was left weak and shaking.

Not one or two or three, but a thick wad of petals, wet and glistening with blood.

His stomach churned, and stupidly, he curled his fist around them, body sore and aching and tired and yet unable to sleep, because there was a creeping fear that reached up his veins that said he might just suffocate and never wake up again. Yesterday, he wanted that. Why did it have to be different today?

Why the fuck couldn't he just live?

Why the fuck couldn't he just get what he wanted, even once?

Why the fuck-!

A noise.

Tommy's head shot up, and he twisted to look over at the trapdoor creaking open. Slow in the darkness, breaking the oppressive quiet that had gripped the attic so tightly. A mop of curly hair emerged, followed by a hollow, haunting, stupidly punchable face. The sight of Wilbur sent his stomach curling again, and Tommy tried to wipe all those stupid thoughts from his mind and just be tired instead.

"What do you want, bitch?" he mumbled, glaring, but it was muted, and he knew the roughness to his voice gave him away. God, fuck, his heart felt so loud, pumping painfully in his chest.

"...You were coughing?" Wilbur began, unsure, and his voice was so startling, so fucking nice to hear, that Tommy didn't immediately want to push him back down the ladder. Instead he watched the monster hoist himself up into the room, sitting on the floor facing Tommy.

"I'm always coughing," Tommy retorted, giving a dismissive flick Wilbur's way, his other hand still curled tight around the flower petals, hiding a crime he wasn't sure the extent of, feeling the way blood fit underneath his nails.

"I thought it sounded bad," Wilbur clarified. "Are you okay?"

Tommy blinked at him. "The fuck? What kind of question is that?"

Wilbur rolled his eyes. "The kind that's not hard to answer, gremlin."

"You got out of bed, climbed all the way up here, to ask me if I'm okay because you heard me coughing?" Tommy said, gesturing aimlessly. "A thing I do literally constantly?"

"Answer the question."

"Fuck you," Tommy said automatically. "Why do you even care? You've never checked up on me before."

Wilbur scooted forward on the floor, so he could fold his arms on the side of the bed and rest his chin on them, looking up at Tommy with an expression he hated. "I said I was going to care about you. Hence, here I am, caring about you. Answer the question."

Tommy turned to the side to cough again, but made sure to flip Wilbur off in the meantime. Something in his stomach was curling tighter at the monster's words, his brain humming with memories of that voice, saying *I care about you*.

Tommy hated everything that was happening.

His shoulders hunched up, thin frame shaking, as another fit settled into place, and found himself hacking up petals more than he'd like. Suddenly, there was a touch, a hand resting on his back, lightly beginning to rub, and Tommy jerked harshly before his brain caught up, smacking away the arm. "Don't," he hissed, coughing out the last of the fit. "Don't-" but he probably wasn't making sense, and Wilbur was staring at him, and Tommy needed to at least pretend to be normal.

“You said you wouldn’t be like him,” he groused, not quite able to look at the monster at his bedside. “He used to do that shit all the time. Rub my back ‘n pretend to care.”

Two human eyes blinked at Tommy. “I do care.”

For fuck’s sake. Tommy huffed, “That’s not the point, dickhead. It still feels... feels like him.”

For a minute, he just stared at the creature beside him, that looked back unblinking in a quiet attic, something uncomfortable itching under Tommy’s skin, a shame he couldn’t put a name to.

“I won’t be like him,” Wilbur promised, soft and easy. “Is there anything I can do that he wouldn’t?”

Tommy bit his lip, still hunched over on the bed. It was selfish. It was so fucking selfish and unnecessary, but being alone in the garden, alone in the house, alone in the fucking attic, was weighing and weighing, and just once Tommy wanted to be able to breathe without it being the only thing he could hear. It was a moment of stupid, thoughtless vulnerability. That was the only reason he said what he did.

“Just stay here for a bit.”

It turns out that was all it took.

Wilbur hummed as he rested his back against the bed, and he just sat there, content, while Tommy watched him. For- For minutes. He just sat with Tommy, and it was so weird, and Tommy had no idea why he was doing it.

“You know, no human has ever wanted me to hang out with them before,” Wilbur then mused, loudly. His head lulled back onto the blanket, so he could grin at Tommy. “You’re something special.”

“I have a higher tolerance for bullshit,” Tommy retorted. And, fuck, and he was coughing again, curling up, chest seizing, a harsh fit into his arm, and there were petals, a lot of petals, but not as much as the clump in his hand.

“Tommy,” Wilbur said, and Tommy couldn’t read the tone, he was too distracted by the dizzying ache that made his head fuzzy as his muscles strained to cough. The monster had risen to his knees to turn to him though, reaching out, but not touching. Never touching. Flittering from Tommy’s shoulders and back to in front of him, to his hands curled in the sheets. “Can I touch-? Is touching your hands okay?”

Tommy blinked, because why the fuck was Wilbur even asking permission, but he gave a jerky nod since why not, as he tried to catch his breath back.

Unfamiliar fingers curled over the back of Tommy’s hands, rubbing gentle circles. The fingertips were rough with ridges and little dips, as honeycomb holes passed over Tommy’s skin in a shuddering texture that made goosebumps crawl.

The coughing fit subsided, and he was left sitting there with flower petals clinging to his lips, fingernails digging into his palms as Wilbur sat half on the bed now, nearly holding both his hands. Tommy stared at the little movements of Wilbur's fingers, the feeling of the little holes just the worst, but also sort of grounding in a way he couldn't explain. Something for his brain to fixate on, that wasn't his own laboured breathing and the clenching of his gut, and the bloody flower petals strewn on the bed around them.

Then, gently and slowly, Wilbur coaxed Tommy's fingers to uncurl, so his left hand lay open, an unfamiliar thumb rubbing small circles in the palm. His other hand was still clenched tight around the petals, unwilling to let go, even as Wilbur tried to get him to. The monster's eyes flicked up to attempt to meet his own, but Tommy was set on staring down at the blanket, scarcely breathing.

"Tommy."

His breath hitched without his permission, his mind staticky, and he could do nothing but watch as Wilbur finally succeeded in prying his hand open. A thick wad of petals, the evidence he'd been so desperately trying to hide, was revealed. There was blood staining his palms and packed under his nails. The smell was sickeningly sweet.

"I'm sorry," Tommy said, and his brain was fuzzy, but the wave of guilt was a crisp, familiar undercurrent. A part of himself that he felt so disconnected from, that recognized a pressing presence and catalogued it as *Dream*, rose up, trying to do damage control to a situation he didn't even fully understand. Small and scared and confused. "Sorry, I'm trying to get better, I'm trying, I don't-" Because it had to know what the clumps of petals meant, Dream had to know that Tommy was getting worse, it had to know that Tommy wasn't- wasn't caring enough. That despite all its efforts Tommy couldn't seem to live, as much as he wanted to.

There was the hazy memory of a monster on that garden wall, staring at Tommy without a face, wanting a promise that Tommy refused to give. He'd known, in that moment, and he knew now, that maybe Wilbur wasn't enough to save him. It was a terrifying thought.

"Sorry," he whispered hoarsely. "I'm sorry it's not enough but I don't- I don't-" The words were empty, set to repeat, and Tommy couldn't look at it, couldn't look at Dream, couldn't look at anything but the petals.

Not until it was holding both his hands again, no longer rubbing, but instead curling its fingers around his, securing them, holding them tight, and Tommy shut up instinctively, waiting for the inevitable. For the grip to turn bruising. For the sharp nails to dig into his skin. For beads of blood to rise up from a thousand stinging cuts. For Dream to- to- Oh. But this wasn't Dream, was it?

"Why are you apologising?" Wilbur asked, but he wasn't accusing, it wasn't harsh, it was just soft and quiet and a part of Tommy's brain was crying out with some relief he didn't know the name of.

"I-I'm still dying," he tried to explain, breath hitching and stuttering, mind fuzzy and staticked at the edges, flickering between panic and clarity, fear and defeat. Dream and Wilbur. "It's- It's getting worse and I can't- I know you care. I know you care but it's getting

worse and I'm not- I'm not getting better and I'm going to die and I don't- I don't want to do that to you I know you care--

"Tommy," it said again—and god fuck who was it—and its grip tightened around his hands, and its thumbs were rubbing little circles that Tommy stared at, fixated.

"-I can't- I can't take that inhaler again, I can't- It hurt and I- I'm sorry I can't-" There were small holes in the pads of the fingers. Wilbur had small holes in the pads of his fingers.

"Tommy." It was Wilbur. There were stiff ridges between the holes, catching on the fine lines of Tommy's skin.

He breathed, and stared, and if he just focused hard enough, maybe it would all come into clarity again. Then, a hand let go, and he was drifting.

"-I'm sorry, I can't, I'm sorry, and I... I..."

It touched his cheek. Cold. Clear. Little bumps that pressed into his skin. A hand held his cheek, and when he looked up, some part of him was able to register that it was Wilbur he was staring at.

"Tommy," Wilbur said carefully, once more. Tommy blinked at him. "Hey, look at me. You said it yourself. It's a magical disease. Fuck if we know what it wants. It's not going to be your fault."

*It's not going to be your fault.*

*'You get to choose whether you live or die.'*

*'You're always bringing these things on yourself.'*

It was always Tommy's fault.

"It is," Tommy said, quickly, in a breath. His eyes flicked down and away, and the only reason his chest convulsed with air was because there were two anchor points, burning their way into his skin past the guilt that threatened to choke him. "I- Phil knows it too. It's- It's my own thoughts and my feelings that- that make it worse. 'n I can't stop. I can't- I can't do better. I know you care and I can't--"

"Tommy--"

"-I'm fucking this up. I can't- I'm fucking it up--"

"You're not," Wilbur interrupted fiercely, causing Tommy to flinch. Wilbur quieted, speaking softly, so softly. He was holding Tommy's hands. Dream never held his hands, not like this, not for this long, not without some glass to make the affection bleed- "I'm the one who's fucking it up."

Tommy blinked again, and his eyes were wet when he jolted to look at Wilbur. At the monster that suddenly couldn't meet his gaze as it went on, "I left you. I didn't realize it then

but I'm- You asked me to stay, just now. But- But you always wanted me to stay, didn't you?"

"N-No, it's fine, you're not--"

"I am. I'm fucking up too. We're both- We're both just trying our best, alright Tommy? You're alright. I won't leave you anymore."

*I won't leave you anymore.*

But that was the thing, Wilbur. Everyone leaves. Everyone fucking leaves, and promises mean nothing, and friendship means nothing, and the ones that were supposed to keep him safe were the ones that hurt him the most. Tommy was... was so fucking tired of being hurt, and being scared, and bleeding for people and he...

...he trusted Wilbur, didn't he? Why did he trust Wilbur?

Because Wilbur was all he had left. The only thing keeping him here. And Tommy, selfish, so selfish, wouldn't let go of him. Tommy would sink in his claws and fangs, and bleed him dry like a parasite, and for some godforsaken reason Wilbur let him. Wilbur was holding on just as tightly as he was.

Tommy didn't know how or when it happened, but he had pitched forward, his hands ending up fisted in the front of Wilbur's shirt, and he was leaning over, tucked against it, forehead pressed to a chest that had no heartbeat, breath stuttering and shaking. Wilbur's hand had slipped off his cheek, and Tommy's eyes were wet, but it didn't matter when he buried his face in fabric. Maybe he was crying. He hoped he wasn't.

"Fuck you," Tommy whispered, voice hoarse, and there was something, something he needed Wilbur to understand but it was terrifying, and he was scared. He couldn't say it, because he was weak, and he couldn't- Wilbur only wanted him alive when he was strong, but he wasn't- "You- You made me scared of dying." The words were poisonous, and Tommy was drifting. "You made me want to live, you fuck. I-I wanted to die and now... now I'm still going to die."

The monster moved. It was taller than Tommy, sitting on the bed as Tommy hunched over, and he could feel it curl around him. There was a chin resting on his head. There were arms, unfamiliar, wrapped around his thin frame, pulling him closer, until he was pressed against a body that smelled like wet gunpowder and algae. Worse, it smelled like rain. Familiar. So familiar, and Tommy's eyes were closed, and he felt- felt-

"Do you trust me?" Wilbur whispered around him, pressed into his hair.

"F-Fuck you--"

"Do you think you can trust me?" it said, changing the words, and Tommy fumbled to keep up. "Do you think you can trust your life to me? You- You believe you're still going to die, right? You're preparing to die, I think, but what if you didn't? What if you just trust that I'll keep you alive?"

“It’s a- a magical disease, Wilbur, you can’t-“

“What about tonight?” it murmured, and it had pulled him closer, arms tight around him, but not bruising, never bruising. An envelopment that pressed into him. “Can you trust me not to let you die tonight?”

Tommy opened his mouth, and it was so fucking stupid. All of this was so fucking stupid. His brain was a piece of garbage that said he wanted to live, but was still letting him die but- but Wilbur wasn’t his brain. He wasn’t his thoughts. He wasn’t Dream. Wilbur was promising to keep him alive, just for tonight, but maybe... maybe that would be enough.

“You’re a bitch and- and a coward,” Tommy hissed, sucking in a breath, something hot pricking at the corners of his eyes. “Fuck off, don’t let me die tonight.”

“Is that a yes?”

Tommy pressed closer, eyes squeezed shut, until all that overwhelmed his mind was a cloying smell and a chest that expanded when it breathed but didn’t beat with a heart. Until he could feel pieces of himself rise back to the surface. “I fucking hate you. I- I can’t believe you made me want to live, you bitch. You’re supposed to- to kill people.”

“I’m multi-talented.”

“You’re a piece of shit. I-I’m going to stab you in the morning.”

“I look forward to it.”

None of this made sense. None of this made any fucking sense, and Tommy’s brain was still buzzing, was still a million miles away, but something was back, was closer, was relieved.

Wilbur moved, shifting them both, until he could lean against the wall, and until Tommy was against him, arms still wrapped tightly around him. Tommy buried his face into the coat that smelled like smoke and rain and gunpowder, and refused to think about how nice it was to be held like this.

How safe it felt.

None of this was safe. None of this was even permanent. And Tommy sure as fuck didn’t trust Wilbur, but Wilbur wasn’t Dream, and apparently that was all it fucking took. That was all it took for Tommy to sink into whatever feeling of safety had converged on him, and trust that Wilbur would be enough to see him alive in the morning.

Trusting that it would be alright to maybe want to live.

He kept his eyes squeezed closed, and the stuttering, panicked part of himself that was always just so scared finally died away. Finally sunk into what was beneath, what was tired and apathetic and couldn’t feel fear even if he wanted to. It should have been easy. It should have been so easy to fall into how it was before, to feel nothing at all, but he could still feel the arms around him, the chest beneath him and the way someone’s breath pressed against his hair, the soft whistles of it echoing in the quiet attic.

It was a hug.

That was probably the last coherent thought Tommy had as he finally let himself drift. That, and the burning, regretting trust, that stupid assurance, that little voice that whispered to him: *It's okay. You're going to live through tonight.*

Tommy fell asleep, knowing that he'd wake up.

## Chapter End Notes

You thought i was done with the parallels but jokes on you i'm never done

Tommy, dumping all his eggs into Wilbur's basket: this is a healthy thing to do  
Wilbur, holding that basket: this is so fucking heavy i might have made a mistake

Also mmm. You remember that spicy fawn response from chapter 4? Yeah, welcome back to that. Tommy is doing fucking fine.

Maybe things will get better now. Maybe they won't.

Tumblr [@space-anon-writes](#)

(Also there's been more AlliumMonster!Tommy fanart added to the Rotted House AU Oneshot endnotes, so head over there to check it out!)



# I Swear I Hate You

## Chapter Summary

Wilbur finally takes Tommy on a walk through the forest.

## Chapter Notes

crimeboys go brrrrrr. that is all

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts, dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, blood, injury, tryphobia, referenced past child abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy breathed softly, feeling the way warm air puffed back against his face. Something shifted, rustling, loud in his ears after being asleep. The noise was enough to draw him back to consciousness, to fight the haze, and finally, he woke up. He blinked, staring for a minute at the dust motes in the air against a backdrop of brown fabric.

The first thing he noticed was that he was leaning against something. The second thing he noticed was that whatever he was leaning against was moving. The third thing was that he was cold, but by that point he was way more preoccupied with the second.

“Fuck,” he grumbled, pushing himself up, and there were unfamiliar arms, heavy and cumbersome, looped around him. His cheek felt chilled without the rise and fall of a chest against it, but Tommy ignored that sensation in favour of giving Wilbur a displeased expression, even if the monster was being a bitch and still sleeping, soft whistles sounding.

Wilbur’s arms tightened around him briefly, enough to bring up vague memories of the night. Hazy recollections to waking up to the usual coughing fit, pained and tired, only to feel someone rubbing circles on his palms before drawing him back to lay down again as if falling asleep wasn’t a task.

He wasn’t alone last night.

Wilbur kept his promise. What an absolute bitch.

Tommy writhed a little more, already winded just trying to get out of the bastard's grip, and finally the arms fell away, and Wilbur looked down at him with a sleepy blink.

"Wha...?"

"Where are my blankets, Wilbur," Tommy said flatly, glaring into sleepy eyes. His back was cold from where his single remaining blanket had slipped off sometime in the night. A weird thing to complain about, but Tommy had gotten stupidly used to being warm.

"What?" Wilbur repeated, just as slurred.

"You left my blankets in the fucking forest, Wilbur," Tommy enunciated carefully.

"Oh," Wilbur said. "I'll get them in the morning."

With that declaration, Wilbur fell to the side onto the mattress, attempting to take Tommy with him, except that Tommy was done with this shit now. Last night may have been a thing, but that didn't mean he had to acknowledge it. He only had emotions late at night, he refused to have them any other time. Also it was getting claustrophobic as fuck.

"Fuck off!" Tommy snapped, shoving a hand he wiggled free into Wilbur's face, trying to jam a finger into one of the holes in the process.

"Ow, fuck, gremlin," Wilbur hissed, voice still slurring. "What do you want?"

"Let go you bastard!" Tommy groused, writhing some more, and without complaint Wilbur let him get away. Tommy twisted around, safely on the edge of the bed, to find Wilbur hunched and curled on the mattress, watching him with sleepy half-lidded eyes. He'd stayed the night. He'd stayed the fucking night, like a coward, a bitch, an absolute fucking wrong'n.

Tommy huffed and got up, legs and arms shaky and trembling, and nearly tripped over his crutches that were scattered on the floor in the process. Oh. Oh fuck he had those now. He stared at them for a moment, blinking, then carefully picked them up, tucking them beneath his shoulders with ease. Huh.

Then he eyed the ladder, and resolved to burn this fucking place to the ground.

"I'm getting breakfast," Tommy announced, already hucking his crutches through the hole with an ear-grating clatter. He winced, knowing he should be more careful with them, but honestly not having the patience this early in the morning.

"Mmm, okay," Wilbur hummed, nothing but a mound on the bed. "'m going back to sleep."

Tommy watched him for a moment, coughing into his sleeve, but didn't know what he should do about the situation. Probably nothing.

He focused instead on shuffling himself down the ladder, numb to the pain in his shredded palm, even if it was stinging worse after a day pressed against his crutches and holding onto wire shoulders.

Three rungs down he paused to cough again, taking the chance to check on Wilbur, but the monster's eyes were closed and he was whistling air through the holes in his cheeks, so Tommy let him be.

"Good morning, Tommy," Phil greeted easily from the kitchen, causing him to flinch. He sort of wondered if Phil just stood there all night or something. It was always waiting for him constantly. Tommy would feel bad, but Phil was now the number one asshole in Tommy's books, so he didn't. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Tommy muttered, throat sore as usual, muscles stiff, but he tried to ignore it.

He still couldn't taste the broth today, his tastebuds having been eviscerated not that long ago, but he ate regardless, wondering if the soup was as good as Wilbur had made it seem to be. Eventually, there was the creak of the ladder, and the bitch himself came downstairs, yawning with a jaw that stretched too wide while stumbling over to the table.

To Tommy's surprise and irritation, the bitch planted his chin right on top of Tommy's head, bodily leaning on him. "Fuck off," Tommy muttered, but didn't stop him.

"Me hungie," Wilbur informed him eloquently. "Want soup."

Tommy rolled his eyes, and offered up the spoonful of soup he'd been about to eat. Wilbur accepted, which pretty much meant that Tommy's breakfast was forfeit now, as he was forced to be squashed under the monster when it leaned over him to eat his soup.

"Wilbur, you could've just gotten your own bowl," Phil huffed, tilting its head and observing.

"I wanted what Tommy's having," Wilbur mumbled, and ate a spoonful spitefully, eventually giving up on trying to crush Tommy and instead moving to sit on the bench beside him, right where there was no room, forcing Tommy to scoot over.

"Mate, it's all the same food," Phil tried to reason, but that was when the basement trapdoor opened, the scent of blood arose, and then Techno with a clean boar skull meandered over to the table.

"Bitch," Tommy greeted.

"Child," Techno replied.

The table groaned as it sat down, a lumbering shadow over Tommy with its head nearly scrapping the ceiling.

"Techno," Phil said.

"Phil," Techno said.

"Wilbur," Wilbur said.

Tommy leaned forward on his arms as he absently watched the monsters at the table eat their breakfast. He could probably ask for more, since Wilbur had taken his portion, but he wasn't

really hungry and didn't feel like talking much. Not when all he could taste was just blood and flowers. He noted that when Techno took its bowl, it added a few wet bits of flesh that Tommy didn't even begin to wonder at the origin of, and avidly avoided looking at as he turned to observe Wilbur instead, who was drinking the last of the broth with a hum.

"Ready, child?" he asked with a grin, when he was done.

"Ready for what?" Tommy said cautiously, sitting up a bit more, but Wilbur just smiled wider.

"I gotta get something from my room, then meet me outside!"

Oh, they were probably doing another bonding thing then. Tommy sort of didn't want to see how this one turned out, but last night had been okay, so maybe today would be better. He eased himself from the bench onto his crutches again, covering the distance to the door and fiddling with the knob for a moment to get outside. He tried not to think about how weird it was to be leaving on his own, without somebody beside him or a lock stopping him.

How weird it was that the front door of the cottage had no lock.

Outside it was the same nice weather, if not a bit chilly, and Tommy absently watched goosebumps prickle along his arm until Wilbur joined him. He had something slung across his shoulders, and it took Tommy a moment to realise it was a guitar case.

"Uh," he said eloquently, but Wilbur cut him off.

"Come on child, I have a place in mind," he said easily, leading the march off the porch and to the garden's edge. Tommy hesitated for a moment, but there wasn't really a reason not to follow, so he hefted his crutches and focused on not tripping on the flagstone path.

Wilbur held the gate open for him, and then they were both under the trees, following a winding trail that the monsters must have walked a thousand times. It branched shortly, and they followed the path that twisted around to lead into the forest back behind the house. Tommy spitefully glared at the flowers he could see across the stone fence when they passed, and mouthed a silent promise to end their fucking lives one of these days.

The dirt was dry and crumbly beneath Tommy's bare feet, and he made a note to maybe ask for some shoes sometime. It was harder to run away without shoes, but they'd given him back his crutches, so maybe they didn't care. Besides, Tommy had seen the stretches of forest between here and civilization. He wasn't escaping, even with crutches and shoes.

As they went, Tommy couldn't help but think about how different this journey felt against all the others. He was walking on his own, keeping pace, able to actually take his time and stop when he wanted to, whether that was to catch his breath or to stare at an animal between the trees. Wilbur matched his speed, never commenting on if he was fast or slow, and stopped uncomplaining, simply watching Tommy breathe or cough or pick a thorn out of his foot until he was ready to move again.

The unfortunate part was that this couldn't last. They didn't walk all that far before Tommy's arms felt shaky, and he could feel his muscles trembling from an exhaustion that had never really gone away. This wasn't running away in the middle of the night fueled by adrenaline and desperation. This was a slow jaunt through the forest, and Tommy was tired.

"Wil," he began, but didn't know how to finish that. He couldn't say he was tired or that his feet hurt. He couldn't describe the deep exhaustion that clung to every scrap of his being. The way his chest ached with the ragged inhale of every breath past the blockage in his lungs. So instead, Tommy settled for doing something that wouldn't give away all his weaknesses, and simply sat down on the grass where he was.

Wilbur paused ahead of him, turned back to clearly see if Tommy would be getting up again any time soon, if this was just another break. Instead, Tommy held his gaze, waiting as well.

"I'm not moving," Tommy informed him eloquently, without bothering to explain why. He doubted fatigue would be a very familiar concept to a monster. Instead, he tried to prove his point further by riding out a coughing fit, hacking up a mass of petals into his arm and then wiping them off on his shirt.

"But we're not there yet," Wilbur complained, gesturing to the path.

"Well then how close are we?" Tommy demanded, voice going hoarse, chest aching. Maybe he could get up again, if it wasn't too far.

"Mmm, five or ten more minutes."

Tommy pretended to consider. "Fuck no. You can go on without me but I'm not moving."

"Why not?" Wilbur protested. "We've barely walked anywhere!"

Tommy stared at him and then broadly gestured at his legs.

"But you have your crutches?" Wilbur pointed out, clearly confused.

"It's not a miracle cure, bitch," Tommy hissed. "I still can't walk that far." To demonstrate, he held up an arm, to show how his hand had visible tremors from the unfamiliar effort of moving his crutches. Shaking with an exhaustion that never went away.

Wilbur watched, unblinking, then took a few steps closer and crouched in front of Tommy, reaching out and taking his hand. He pressed Tommy's fingers flat, like he did last night, and then loosened his grip, feeling how the muscles shook and jittered on their own. How difficult it was just to keep Tommy's arm steady, thin and ragged as it was.

"Legs are the same way right now," Tommy supplied.

Wilbur blinked at him, human eyes hidden by swirling charcoal voids. "You are so fucking bad at walking."

"Fuck off, I'm great at walking," Tommy snapped back, coughing into a fist. "My body's just shit right now."

Wilbur snorted, standing back up and crossing his arms haughtily. “Was there a time when it wasn’t shit?”

Tommy shrugged, grimacing at the gritty smoothness of the flower petals. “Well, yeah. I used to run around all the time as a kid, doing shit, getting into trouble. Especially with Tub- with a friend.”

“You have friends?”

“More than you, dickhead,” Tommy grouched, and didn’t bother to correct the tense. He just coughed through a second fit, and glared at the damning amount of petals that were sticky against his palm with blood and spit. “I was known as the little shit with too much energy. Had stamina for days.”

“So why don’t you anymore?”

The question felt rhetorical, but Wilbur made it sound sincere. It still made Tommy pause for a moment, keeping his breathing steady, trying to pretend that any tremors belonged solely to exhaustion.

“I broke my leg,” Tommy said carefully. “And the hanahaki got worse. Used to just sort of be like asthma. The last... The last couple months have kind of been shit.” He rubbed at his eyes. “Now ‘m just tired all the time.”

Wilbur was silent for a minute, then he heaved a sigh, readjusting the strap on his guitar case. “Could you be tired in a few more minutes? There’s someplace we need to get to,” he practically whined, and Tommy rolled his eyes.

Then, to be a brat: “What will you pay me?”

“What?”

“What will you pay me to walk with you another minute?” Tommy repeated patiently.

Wilbur stared at him a moment, then started rifling through the pockets of his coat with strained desperation. “I don’t have any human currency on me.”

“Sucks for you then,” Tommy said, starting to get comfortable on his little patch of dirt.

“Ah!” Wilbur suddenly declared, pulling out a fistful of paper. “Does Monopoly money work?”

For a second, Tommy forgot what it was like to have a brain. What. What the fuck. He sat up and stared, and indeed, familiar paper notes stared back at him. “Why the fuck do you have Monopoly money.”

“It’s from the board game Monopoly,” Wilbur informed him.

“I know what the fuck Monopoly money is you bitch, I’m asking why you have some!”

Wilbur just said nothing and looked at him, like an absolute bitch, before waving the paper in his face. “Will this work? Monopoly money for another minute of walking?”

“I...” Tommy began, fading off. “You know what, fuck it. Yeah I’ll take Monopoly money.”

Wilbur forked over the cash and Tommy pocketed it appropriately. He then huffed, gathering himself and easing himself to his feet, still aching, and it was a more painful process than he’d like, but the thought of staying where he was and risking finding out what else was in Wilbur’s coat pockets was enough motivation. The Monopoly money weighed heavily in his pocket.

Wilbur, the bastard, looked almost smug as Tommy hobbled over, and Tommy raised an eyebrow at him in turn, waiting for the monster to take the lead into the forest.

The pace was slower than it had ever been, and Tommy’s breaths were heavy and audibly wheezy, but Wilbur seemed more strained, peering through the forest ahead of them, near bouncing on his feet, although he remained by Tommy’s side.

“It should just be... there!” Wilbur declared, darting ahead a few steps, and Tommy blinked, ogling the mound at Wilbur’s feet. “Ta da! The blankets!” Wilbur announced proudly, and Tommy could only stand there, stunned.

The blankets were clumped and a bit dirty, but the ridiculous amount of them proved they were all there.

“Huh,” Tommy said, and then standing was too much work, so he used a tree to ease himself to the ground again. “That’s why you wanted to come out here.”

“Essentially,” Wilbur agreed. “I would’ve gone and gotten them myself but uh,” he hesitated there, eyes flicking over to Tommy, then to the crutches on the ground. “You didn’t want me to, right?”

Tommy, for a moment, wondered if he could pay Wilbur with Monopoly money to never talk about this again. “It’s fine,” he said instead, even though that wasn’t an answer. “It’s-Mmmf!” A lump of blankets was then dropped on him, and Tommy spluttered under their weight, shoving them to see Wilbur grinning down at him. “Fuck off!”

Wilbur barked out a sharp laugh, succeeding in patting Tommy’s head only because Tommy was too preoccupied trying to shove the blankets to the side so he didn’t fucking drown. “Careful what you wish for, child.”

“Careful who you piss off, bitch. I’ll fucking stab you,” Tommy threatened, eyes narrowing as he watched Wilbur plop himself down on the ground a few meters away, finally unslinging the instrument case from around his shoulders.

Wilbur hummed, clicking open the case, and Tommy could now see the shape of a sleek acoustic guitar. “With what, your stubby little baby claws?”

“Uh, fuck you? Like you could do any better with your pedicured ass.”

“I need the upkeep to make my nails precise,” Wilbur countered, but he didn’t fucking deny getting a pedicure as far as Tommy was concerned. He held his hand up so Tommy could see, sinuously flexing the multiple joints of his fingers to show their long, sharpened ends. “They’re good for maiming. I can slip these around an eye and sever it cleanly from its socket with only a twist of my wrist. It’s terrifying.”

Tommy stared at him. “Literally no one asked.”

Wilbur huffed, yanking the guitar a little more forcefully than necessary onto his lap. “Nobody in this forest appreciates my talent.”

Tommy went for another retort, but then Wilbur was strumming an idle hand down the cords and... huh. Tommy blinked. It had... alright, it had been a long time since he’d listened to music, let alone been around an instrument. There was a crisp, jolting clarity to it that was... nice. It was nice.

The way Wilbur started playing was different though. His fingers weren’t human, not by a long shot, and the extra joints curled around the strings carefully. He didn’t need a pick, his stupid manicured claws long and needle-like, but thick enough to be effective. He moved... precisely. Each strum or pluck was done with a languid and visual ease, too long bones and too many joints contorting sinuously to make it work.

Tommy watched, enraptured despite himself, and felt something in his mind grow a bit softer and fuzzier at the music. It was... nice. To just hear a guitar strum. To feel a small breeze in his hair and grass beneath his feet. He tilted over to the side, into the pile of blankets, and stared at Wilbur perpendicular.

At some point Wilbur started humming and then started forming words. They were mumbled and soft and unintelligible, like the voice that had drifted into Tommy’s window, but closer. It was louder and more distinct, spiraling into Tommy’s mind and plucking at it. He took a stuttered breath. He sort of wanted to stand up now, to wander, but his body was heavy and the compulsion had never been very strong to begin with.

Instead, he curled his fist into a blanket, and tried not to wish that his feet didn’t hurt.

“I know what you’re doing,” he grumbled, shoving his face further into the fabrics. “I’m not fucking walking again, bitch.”

Wilbur’s voice stuttered, fading out for a moment, although the languid sound of the guitar kept its melody. “How’d you know that’s what I was trying to do?”

“Can feel it,” Tommy offered. “Like an itch, sort of, to get up and go places. You fucking suck at getting kids to follow you into the forest though.”

“Fuck off, child, I got you to follow me this far,” Wilbur protested, playing his guitar a bit louder.

“And not a single moment goes by where I don’t regret that decision,” Tommy replied dryly. “I should get up and leave, just to spite you.”



“I have more Monopoly money.”

“Fuck you, you can’t bribe me forever.”

There was a moment. “Do you want me to stop playing?”

Tommy froze, shoulders hunching up. “I didn’t say that.”

Wilbur hummed, and Tommy didn’t need to look at the fucker to know that he was grinning. Tommy huffed, pulling one of the blankets around himself to stave off the chill. He watched, through half-lidded eyes, the way that Wilbur played. How carefully each string was plucked. How each finger bent beyond itself to conform to a human hand.

He wondered, vaguely, why Wilbur hadn’t played guitar to begin with, back when the monster had only been a voice in the wind.

“Why are you doing this anyway?” Tommy asked instead.

Wilbur spared him a glance, but there was never a break in the strumming of the instrument. “I’m trying to help you live through today,” he said simply. “You trust me to do that, don’t you?”

Tommy blinked, awake now, opening his mouth, but he hadn’t thought of what to say. “Fuck off, what? I only trusted you to help me live through last night.”

“Well, I figured why not do the same today?” Wilbur offered, his voice quiet as he focused on his guitar, but deceivingly, Tommy could see that his eyes were on him. “You lived through last night, so why not do it again. I’ll help you live through today, then tonight, then tomorrow, and every day after. We’ll take this one day at a time.”

“That’s stupid,” Tommy protested, shoving himself up and off the blankets. His shoulders were hunched, and there was no fucking stutter or crack to his voice. “That plan is stupid, and you’re stupid, and I hate you.”

Wilbur grinned, his fingers plucking a quick little mocking melody. “I take it that means you approve.”

“I don’t approve of shit, bitch.”

There was still that stupid smile on his face, so pleased with himself, with cheeks stretched wide and honeycomb holes pulled taut. “Do you trust me, Tommy?”

Fuck, Tommy hated his answer to that. Actually, he hated all of this. He especially hated how that little voice in his mind sang in relief, and how some part of himself, however miniscule, felt grateful. “I’ll never trust you, but fuck it, I’ll make an exception for today,” he said, tone scathing. “And not a moment longer.”

“There are easier ways to just say yes,” Wilbur chided, and Tommy rolled his eyes.

“Says the person who refused to admit to wanting to murder me when we first met.”

“Well, in my defence you weren’t supposed to know that.”

Tommy threw his hands up, letting himself fall back into the blankets. “What else should I have thought when a creepy fuck-off monster showed up at my window? That you had good intentions?”

“Hey, walks are a pure form of exercise you know.”

“Walks are the work of the fucking devil.”

“You’re biased.”

“You’re an ass.”

Wilbur let out a loud sigh, playing the next chords especially loud to drown out Tommy’s middle finger. “Gremlin,” he said just softly, and Tommy rolled his eyes but let him have this one.

Admittedly, falling asleep to the sound of the guitar after a minorly emotionally painful conversation wasn’t what Tommy thought would be on today’s agenda, but apparently that’s what happened. Not that he was conscious for most of it. He honestly did just mean to listen, but as the time passed, his eyes closed, and he drifted with fresh air in his lungs and crisp sounds in his ears.

It gave him weird... dreams. Not quite dreams. Just flashes of imagery that his mind struggled to remember later. A half-awake feeling of seeing thick warped trees all around him, with branches that were bulging fingers pressed into a viscous, languid sky. Disembodied fractures across his shin, seeping blood that travelled wetly down his leg. Dreams of walking and walking and walking, until his feet were sore, with a distant and vague melody leading him forth like the lure of an angler fish. The smell of rain.

Weird dreams that made him toss and turn.

Until he gasped awake.

Because Wilbur had lightly kicked him. In his bad shin.

Tommy jolted up with a sharp wheeze, hands shooting to the spiking in his leg, as Wilbur stepped back with his guitar slung over his shoulder. Tommy stamped down on a swear, forcing himself to breathe through a nauseating wave of pain. The kick hadn’t even been that hard, more of a sharp nudge, and it was obvious Wilbur didn’t intend for it to hurt, judging by the way he jolted back slightly at Tommy’s sudden awakening. “Wake up, gremlin.”

Tommy would have killed Wilbur right then if it wouldn’t have been entirely counterproductive, and also if it didn’t mean that the damn monster would die before him.

Wilbur, in whatever innocent gesture gently prodding Tommy’s leg to wake him up had been, had managed to nail the impact directly in the middle of Tommy’s shin, where the fractures had been their worst.

Just... fuck Wilbur, and his complete lack of situational awareness.

“Ow,” Tommy muttered, when he could get his breath back, coughing into his arm. Wilbur was watching him, looking uncertain and smiling a little less, but Tommy didn’t bother to explain. Pointing out the injury in his leg would just make it a target. He knew how this worked.

“Time to go home, gremlin,” Wilbur said expectantly.

Tommy groaned, cold and tired and stiff and vaguely in pain, and forced himself to stand up. Thankfully, the worst of the pain was fading, but he still let a nearby tree take most of his weight and didn’t dare let his leg make contact with the ground. “You’re a bitch.”

“And you’re a child. Did you need me to carry you back?”

Tommy bit his lip, because he was fucking tired and the thought of the trek back made him want to die inside, but he had his goddamn crutches now and he needed to take advantage before he lost them again. “So you can drop me some more? Not thanks.”

“That was one time!”

Fortunately, Wilbur didn’t seem to mind the fact that their journey back was slower than a snail’s. Tommy tried to keep his breathing even, but the coughing fits that plagued him now were worse than they had been in the morning. He focused on the repetitive swinging of his crutches, and ignored the pain in his cut and blistering palms as they rubbed against the handles, and the pain in the scrapped up soles of his feet. Everything was sore and stiff and hurting, but as he walked it got marginally better as a numbness spread. His leg stopped throbbing, sinking into a feeling like pins and needles, but he didn’t need it to support his weight anyway.

Wilbur was walking at an absolute meander beside him, instrument case slung over his shoulder, hands in pockets as he craned his head way back to take in the scenery and the birds overhead. The sun was very clearly much lower in the sky, and Tommy hated that he didn’t feel too surprised that he’d slept a whole day away.

What was worse, however, was the thought that Wilbur had helped him live through that time.

Tommy was cold, but found a source of entertainment in imagining Wilbur lighting spontaneously on fire. Fuck him, Tommy hated him so fucking much, he hated it worse that he was glad Wilbur didn’t leave him today.

Wilbur was keeping his promise. What an absolutely insane thing to do.

The cottage windows were lit up and warm by the time that Tommy finally fucking stumbled to the end of the trail. His limbs all felt like jelly, but he had the motivation now to circle the garden wall, and enter through the gate that Wilbur held open for him.

Inside, the smell of cooking soup wafted over them, with the hulking form of Techno in one chair reading a comically small book, and the sight of Phil standing near motionless by the wood stove.

“There’s a bath drawn and ready,” Phil told them idly, scarcely moving as it stirred a pot. “Tommy, I noticed that you still had blood on you from the other day, so I thought you might want one.”

This had to be a trap. This felt like a trap. Except Tommy’s scalp was fucking itchy and there was dried blood and dirt under his nails, and a weird gross feeling to his skin after spending so much time sleeping. Oh yeah, and he still had traces of blood on him from when Techno had ‘hugged’ him a few days ago.

“Thanks,” he said, but tried to make it flat and ungrateful, because the last thing he wanted was for Phil of all people to get the idea he owed it something.

The bath was warm when he sunk into it, leaving Wilbur to do whatever in the living room of the cottage. With the door closed, it was silent in the small bathroom, leaving a dull ringing in his ears. The heated water was a nice balm against his aching muscles, and for longer than necessary Tommy soaked in it. There was a harsh sting in the cuts in his feet and the blisters opened in his palms, but he could tune them out fine. He stared at the water again, just because he could, but drowning would probably be as bad as suffocating and he wasn’t... he wasn’t going to suffocate now. Maybe.

There was a new set of clothes waiting for him on the bathroom counter, and Tommy wasn’t going to bother thinking about their origin, although they smelled vaguely like mothballs. He just got dressed, dried off, and picked at old scabs and coughed until he felt like leaving the privacy of the small room.

It had probably been near an hour by the time he carefully pried the door open, crutches tucked neatly underneath his arms, and listened for a moment. There was no movement or sound from the main room, and when he eased himself down the hall, he found the space empty save for a bowl of soup waiting on the table, gone cold. Tommy didn’t bother eating. He wasn’t hungry anyway.

Instead he stared at the ladder to the attic, and gritted his teeth, beginning the tedious process of tossing his crutches up there until they stuck, before hauling himself up the ladder.

He heard the humming before he saw the monster.

It was dark outside now, and the attic was lit by a few lanterns flickering on boxes. In the shadows was the monster. Was the gaping creature of scratched black features, with too long fingers tracing over something unseen.

“Uh, hello?” Tommy muttered peevishly, heaving himself up the rest of the way. “Did you just seriously sit there listening to me try and toss my crutches up here for the last ten minutes without doing anything?”

Wilbur blinked at him, human eyes replacing the voids. “You didn’t ask for help?”

Alright, the monster had him there, but Wilbur was still the asshole in this conversation.

“What are you even doing here anyway?” Tommy asked, shuffling on his knees over to the bed, so he wouldn’t have to bother standing on his feet. The motion sent sharp pains through his shin, still sensitive, but he didn’t let it show on his face.

Wilbur held up the object he’d been fiddling with, which turned out to be a roll of cloth bandages, and to emphasize his point, he nudged at a first aid kit by his foot. “Techno said you were getting blood on his floors again.”

“Since when do you care about Techno’s floors?” Tommy grouched, easing himself onto the edge of the bed with a breath, his arms sore and aching. Even sitting on the ground, Wilbur was somehow taller than him, although Tommy was pretty sure Wilbur’s height varied on a regular basis.

“Since he took away my soup,” Wilbur admitted. “Let me see your feet.”

“Uh, no? What are you, some sort of wrong’n? You can’t just say that to people,” Tommy retorted, purposefully drawing his feet up onto the bed. “I’m a minor.”

“For fuck’s- What was wrong about what I just said?” Wilbur demanded with audible annoyance. “I just need you to show me your feet.”

“You’re a fucking wrong’n,” Tommy confirmed. “What, you like feet?”

“Do I like... what?”

“You keep talking about feet. It’s kind of weird.”

“Well maybe if your feet didn’t bleed so much, we wouldn’t be having this conversation,” Wilbur ploughed on. “Gimme.”

Tommy considered extending the conversation, just to fuck with Wilbur some more, but he was tired and his feet did hurt, and he should probably make sure they didn’t get infected or something. He was still as annoying as possible as he did so, Wilbur just managing to avoid getting kicked in the face.

“God, your skin is fragile,” Wilbur muttered, when the bottom of his feet were exposed. Tommy grimaced and coughed, because it sure fucking felt like it, and then hissed when Wilbur started wiping at the cuts to disinfect them. Worse was when he could feel Wilbur’s nails dig into the skin, retrieving a thorn still wedged in the tissue. “I could flick you in the forehead and your entire skull would shatter.”

“Shut the fuck up, my bones are superior to yours,” Tommy retorted, gritting his teeth as another sizeable splinter was removed.

“Factually untrue.”

“Yeah? When was the last time you drank milk, bitch?”

“Why would I ever want to drink milk?”

The bandages were a soft contradiction when Wilbur carefully wrapped his feet, one after the other, the stinging slowly fading into a dull pain. Tommy stared, for a moment, at the tops of his feet, tracing the idle lines of the bandages. He wasn't sure how to feel about them.

“Oh, right, hands too. I think I saw cuts on them.”

Tommy rolled his eyes, but held out his palms, blisters on the skin beneath his fingers where it had rubbed against the crutches. There were also the deep, crusted scabs from the glass, a few picked at and bleeding. Wilbur was quick and efficient in cleaning them, and wrapping Tommy's palms back up, and Tommy once again found himself idly staring at the bandages.

“You're not-“ he found himself saying, but stopped, because he didn't owe Wilbur anything, and he didn't need to say anything. He could just go to bed. He shouldn't risk any more.

“I'm not...?” Wilbur prompted, and Tommy hated the way he took the bait.

“You're not going to be like Dream, right?” he asked, and his voice was too small, and his eyes didn't leave the bandages wrapped around his hand, the way his fingers curled into fists and then extended again.

Wilbur didn't say anything for just long enough to set Tommy's nerves on end, but his response was predictable. “I promised, didn't I? I'll never be like them.”

“I... earlier today, to wake me up, you uh, you kicked my leg,” Tommy muttered, quick and fast, and why was he doing this, it didn't even matter. It was such a trivial thing and he owed Wilbur nothing. Nothing. “You kicked the leg that was, uh, that was broken before and um. It hurt. I guess.”

Wilbur's eyes were owlish when they blinked, and his expression was carefully blank, and Tommy hated it. “Oh. Uh, which leg was it?”

That made Tommy freeze up, and his hands were in his lap, and his fingers were curling into tight, pinching fists. “You're not- You can't be like Dream.”

“I won't be.”

“So if I tell you-“ Just stop. Stop talking. He'd walked into this trap so many times why couldn't he just avoid it? Why can he never stop giving people reasons to hurt him? “If I tell you, you're not going to- to purposefully hit me there, right? That's something Dream would do and you're not- you're not Dream.”

Please don't be like Dream.

At some point Tommy had stopped looking at Wilbur altogether, his vision simply focused down to his hands, clenched so tightly that he could see red seeping into the white of the bandages. Damningly, he pressed a little harder, to feel that spike of pain.

“Tommy.”

Someone was touching him. A stranger's hand, resting atop his own. It was Wilbur. Wilbur was touching his hand, was holding it, was trailing a small circle across the bandages until Tommy could wrench his eyes away, could look at him.

"Tommy, I won't be like Dream. I promised," Wilbur said carefully. "I won't hurt you anymore."

*You already hurt me*, Tommy wanted to repeat, to watch this conversation go in its circles, but that voice, soft, was there to whisper in his mind again: *I'm not Dream. I don't want to hurt you. I never want to hurt you again, I promise. I hope you can believe me.*

"It's-" And Tommy's mouth was dry. "It's this leg," he said, mind a thousand miles away from this moment. He carefully rubbed a hand along his right leg. "The shin, was um, broken and healed wrong, so it hurts a lot. So you kicked it and it- it hurt a lot, I guess."

It hurt so much that Tommy hadn't been able to breathe, but it hadn't been intentional. It wasn't Wilbur's fault, and Tommy was being greedy. He just didn't want to hurt anymore, but that was always too much to ask. Maybe. Maybe this time could be different, but something told him it wouldn't be.

"Oh," Wilbur said, and he didn't touch the leg, but his eyes were fixated there, as if he could see through the cloth and flesh to the scarred bone beneath. "Does it always hurt?"

Every moment of every day.

"Sometimes," Tommy said. "Did you need anything else or can I sleep?"

Wilbur blinked at him, folding his arms on the edge of the bed and resting his chin there. "You can sleep."

Tommy stared at him.

Wilbur stared back.

"Are you going to fuck off, or...?" Tommy prompted, and fuck, Wilbur was smiling.

"Nope," Wilbur said, popping the word. "Not unless you want me to."

"Why the fuck would you think I want you to stay?" Tommy demanded peevishly.

"Because you asked me to before," Wilbur said. "So here I am."

"And you're, what, just going to sit on the floor the whole night?"

"Yep."

Tommy stared at him some more. "You're the worst."

"You haven't told me to leave yet."

“It’s because I feel sorry for you,” Tommy informed him. He then promptly turned and rolled over on the bed, so his back would be to Wilbur, the absolute fucking bastard. “I can’t believe you made me want to live.”

But there was no reply, and Tommy was staring at the wall, and at some point Wilbur doused the light and it was quiet. Quiet save for two sets of breathing. Tommy carefully squeezed his eyes closed before opening them again. He then rolled over to see Wilbur still had his head propped up on the side of the bed, giving Tommy a sleepy glance.

Something fluttered, unsure in Tommy’s gut, and there was such a disconnect from this moment, as if it were all a stupid dream, and yet it was a stark and real sensation. Wilbur was here. Someone was here. He wouldn’t be alone. That just. That didn’t make sense. Nothing ever made sense.

“Hey,” Tommy said softly, to break the cycle of his thoughts, even as the quiet, rough quality to his voice made him wince.

“Hey,” Wilbur said back, in the same muted volume.

“Guess what?”

Wilbur blinked at him, unsure. “What?”

“You left my fucking blankets in the forest again.”

## Chapter End Notes

Clowns, all of them. The cycle of stupidity continues

Tommy: hey if a human and a monster walked into a forest together and one of them kept forgetting the other’s blankets would that be fucked up or what

Wilbur: i will pay you like ten Monopoly money to stop talking about this

The monopoly money bit straight up felt illegal to write. what is the tone of this fic? I’m not sure. all I know is people keep enabling me so here I am

FANART

-Submission: [Tommy and Techno](#)

-Submission: [Tommy with flower petals](#)

-Submission: [Allium!Tommy](#)

-[Lung <3](#)

Tumblr [@space-anon-writes](#)



# We Love What Hurts Us

## Chapter Summary

Tommy is subject to an impromptu anatomy lesson.

## Chapter Notes

There is an absolutely bombass pun in the first part of the chapter and I need you all to know it and appreciate it.

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, body horror, horror elements, blood and gore, referenced past child abuse, referenced character death, discussions of terminal illness

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Behold,” Wilbur announced, and Tommy distinctly heard a clatter coming from the inside of the smooth wooden case Wilbur slapped down on the table. For a delirious moment, Tommy thought it might actually contain poker chips, and he scooted forward despite himself, coughing into his sleeve.

The little latches on the case flicked open, and Tommy blinked at the polished contents. “Checkers?”

“Chess,” Wilbur corrected with a flourish, removing a glossy checkerboard and setting it on the chequered tablecloth. He then took out the pieces, each of which was impossibly detailed, with sharp edges and smoothed curves, little figurines that looked up at Tommy with solemn expressions as they were placed on the board. “This is Techno’s set.”

“Techno plays chess?” Tommy asked, picking up one of the pieces and holding it closer. The queen stared back at him, serene and ready to stab the shit out of anything that moved.

“He thinks it makes him look refined,” Wilbur mocked, taking a seat across from Tommy and glancing down at the scattered board with a look of intense concentration. “Have you ever played chess before?”

“No.”

“Me neither,” Wilbur said easily, “But Phil’s last human left a documentary on one time, and chess is supposed to be good for human brains or whatever. Environmental enrichment.”

Tommy blinked at him. “I think you’re a little confused, but you’ve got the spirit. Big problem though in the fact that neither of us know how to play chess.”

“Well, it was either this, Monopoly, or Snakes and Ladders, and I didn’t want to deal with the snakes I left in there.”

“Which game has snakes?” Tommy asked, pretending to care.

Wilbur paused. “Well, I mean technically the ladder one, but I wouldn’t say that Monopoly has a zero chance of snakes either. Also it’s missing the money.”

“Fucking wonder why,” Tommy said, and hated himself for the fact that he’d taken the time to move the paper bills from his old set of clothes to the pockets of his new ones. He took a moment to cough again, grimacing at the taste of petals in his mouth. “So are we making up rules then?”

“It’s called refining the game,” Wilbur answered haughtily. “First rule is that how many spaces a piece can move correlates to how tall it is. Obviously this means all my pieces get a plus two bonus. What’s the second rule?”

Tommy hesitated, but it was simple, right? Wilbur made a rule up, so now Tommy got to make one up. That’s... that’s what he was supposed to do. There wouldn’t be a wrong answer. That was too much power though. God, was this how Dream felt? Tommy tried to make the most of it. “Second rule is that the queen, and all women for that matter, are immortal and cannot die. You can only cower before them and hope they don’t crush you beneath their heels.”

“That’s sexist,” Wilbur said.

Tommy scowled at him. “What.”

“You’re assuming that women must wear heels, that’s very sexist of you, Tommy,” Wilbur explained patiently. “Third rule is don’t be sexist.”

“Fourth rule is don’t be a bitch,” Tommy snapped, feeling emboldened. “Fifth rule is that Tommy wins every game, and Wilbur always loses.”

“It’s not your turn to make up a rule,” Wilbur said. “Sixth rule is that the fifth rule is null and void.”

“I’ll cough,” Tommy threatened. “All over Techno’s chessboard. Just blood and petals and spit. He’ll kill me, I think.”

“Seventh rule is no blackmailing,” Wilbur decided, and stuck his tongue out when Tommy flipped him off. “I think we’re ready to start playing.”

“Yeah.”

It went about as well as expected.

And by that Tommy meant that he might be winning? He was unclear if that was because Wilbur was letting him win, or if it was simply dumb luck spawned from the weirdest rule set possible. It was probably the latter, considering that about two minutes later the only pieces left on the board were the queens. In retrospect, Tommy should have seen this coming.

“Chess has an appalling lack of women,” he decided, taking in the desolate board where a massacre had taken place moments before. “Chess is sexist. That goes against rule number three.”

Wilbur grinned at him, setting up the board again. “Alright, do you want to play again with the same rules or should we try new ones-“

“What are you two idiots doing.”

Tommy, who had previously ignored the sound of the trapdoor opening and the wet *fsssh-thumps*, glanced up to see Techno towering over them, in clean clothes and a clean mask, although there was a smudge of blood here and there. So probably not clean then.

“We’re playing chess,” Wilbur informed it. “And I think we decided the fourth rule of chess is don’t be a bitch, so I’m not sure why you’re here.”

Techno stared at them for a moment more, the little movements of its mask betraying the way its eyes glanced between the both of them. “Wilbur, I am four seconds away from sticking a cleaver through your face for stealing my stuff without asking. I suggest you rethink what you just said.”

“Techno,” Wilbur said, matching its tone. “Tommy is literally sitting right here, and Phil told you not to traumatize him.”

“Wilbur, I am long past the point of caring, and I... What am I looking at here?” Techno then asked, eyes having finally caught on the board itself, and Wilbur’s setup, which mostly just involved scattering pieces wherever without regard for side or station.

“Chess,” Wilbur supplied.

“Do either of you even know how to play chess?” Techno questioned, tense.

“No, that’s why we’re making up rules,” Wilbur explained haughtily. “Hence the bitch part. Now fuck off we have a game to play.”

“I- No. No I’m not letting you corrupt the kid into thinking this is what chess is. Move,” Techno said, a low, dangerous rumble to its voice.

“I’m not mov- Ack!”

Tommy watched in morbid fascination as Techno literally hefted Wilbur up by the scruff of his coat and tossed him to the side like a wet ragdoll. Then, the beast took a seat at the table across from Tommy, its form a looming shadow over him.

Carefully, one by one Techno plucked the pieces off the board and started setting them up again, but paused to show Tommy each piece. “This one’s a pawn,” it explained. “It can only move forward one square on a turn, and it can only capture pieces that are diagonal to it by one square as well.”

“That’s dumb,” Tommy answered, coughing into his sleeve, but Techno ignored him and picked up another piece to explain its equally dumb mechanics.

A few pieces in and Tommy was already lost, because seriously, why did this need to be so complicated? But then the board was filled with the correct pieces on the correct sides and in the correct place, and Techno was moving one pawn a space forward from the line. “I’ll start,” it said, and Tommy blinked.

“I uh, don’t really know how to play still,” he said at length, stalling with another cough into his arm, because admitting he wasn’t listening was never a good thing.

“That’s why I’m teaching you,” Techno responded with a calm patience that it sure as fuck didn’t have earlier. “Assuming that you want to learn.”

Oh. So apparently Tommy had a choice. Cool. Interesting. He chose not a cleaver to the face.

“I mean, it’s not like I’m doing anything else today,” he mumbled, and glanced over at where Wilbur was sulking in the corner of the room, glaring daggers at Techno.

Techno nodded once. “Good. You’ll need to pick a pawn to move to free up the pieces behind it, and in time you’ll realise the importance of that decision, but for now let’s start with getting familiar with the pieces and their actions.”

Right, so this was going to be fun.

Yet, as it turned out, playing chess with Techno wasn’t... terrible? It was weird, being taught how to do something, instead of being expected to just know. Naturally, Techno won every game, because it was a bitch that couldn’t take a hit to its ego, but every time it did it would explain its own strategy and point out where Tommy could improve. Just. What the fuck. Tommy had no idea what to do about any of this.

“You’re a weird one, Mister Tech-no-blade,” Tommy muttered, holding his chin in his hand as he moved another piece.

“Why did you say it like that?” Techno asked, putting actual thought into its moves. “Also why did you add ‘blade’ to the end of it?”

Tommy gestured listlessly to the cleaver sunk deep into the table a foot away, from when Wilbur had wandered a bit too close for Techno’s patience. Techno and Tommy both took a moment to consider it. Wilbur continued to be banished to glaring from the corner of the room.

“I needed a new table,” Techno decided with finality. *This was actually my favourite table. I hope Phil can fix it.*

“Yeah, I don’t think anyone could fix this one,” Tommy added idly, and ignored the slightly panicked stare directed his way, keeping his face blank as he considered his next move.

They played out the rest of the game, and Tommy actually blinked when they got to a checkmate. Just. Huh. He won.

“Good game,” Techno said, and started resetting the board.

Tommy blinked again. He looked up at Techno, opening his mouth but- This didn’t- Dream would have never- “Did you let me win?” he asked, voice a bit hoarser than he meant it, but he disguised it by breaking off into a sharp cough.

For a moment, Techno didn’t answer, just watching him, but in the end it shrugged. “Yes and no. I left you an opportunity, but you were the one to spot it and take advantage of it. You have a keen eye.”

Tommy digested that for a moment. “I don’t-“ he started, and then stopped. “You made it obvious,” he decided instead, shoulders hunching up. “I was just putting pieces in places and hoping for the best.”

The skull tilted to the side. “Chess is not a game where luck plays much of a factor. You have a skill for it.” The beast paused. “For chess, I mean. Not luck.”

“Yeah I assumed,” Tommy grumbled, keeping his eyes focused on the board.

“You have terrible luck,” Techno supplied.

“I’m aware.”

“Yeah,” Techno said awkwardly, turning back to the board. “Anyway, another round?”

Tommy shrugged.

It was at that moment Wilbur chose to make his presence known again, and Tommy watched absently as Techno’s hand moved over to the cleaver.

“Don’t,” Wilbur warned, and Techno tilted its skull. “Seriously, I just- Tommy, you’re playing more chess right?”

“...Yeah?” Tommy said. He could probably stop whenever, it wasn’t like this game was interesting, now that he’d won, his hands itching to try again because he was maybe starting to get the hang of it. Just. He could stop, if Wilbur needed him to.

“Great, I, uh,” Wilbur winced. “I was thinking I could go run and get the blankets from the forest. Since you’re uh, just doing this. If you don’t mind me leaving.”

“I don’t mind,” Tommy said, and didn’t bother to ponder if he actually did.

“Great, so I’ll get those, and Techno-“ Wilbur stared at the beast, and the beast stared back. “-just, keep playing chess. Only chess. I am not coming back to find Tommy covered in blood

again. No traumatizing him.”

“He’ll be fine,” Techno said. “Go run your errand.”

Tommy ignored whatever staring contest was going on over his head in favour of making the starting move. He watched, as out of the corner of his eye Wilbur huffed and left, the cottage door clicking closed behind him.

“Your move,” he muttered absently, then jerked back as Techno suddenly stood, slamming its hands heavily on the table.

“We’re done with chess for now,” it rumbled. “Get up and follow me.” Then it proceeded to rip the cleaver out of the table.

Tommy blinked. “I-“

“Up.”

“Are you murdering me? I hate the fact I have to keep asking but it’s really inconvenient timing-“

“Up,” Techno huffed, and the cleaver slammed down into the table again with a shower of splinters, taking out a chunk of the side.

Tommy blinked at it. “Well, rip to the table I guess.”

“It’s repairable.”

“It’s really not.”

“I can drag you, if that’s what you want,” the beast offered. “Get. Up.”

Tommy stood, but only because he was done with being carried places. Also he didn’t want to deal with Wilbur’s bitching if Techno got blood on him again. Techno took off striding across the room, and Tommy lifted up his crutches and kept on its heels.

The instant they were outside—no fucking sign of Wilbur unfortunately—Techno let the cleaver drop, its weight slamming into the dirt with a splatter and drawing a heavy line as Techno marched them towards the cellar doors. “I’m getting murder vibes here,” Tommy offered, but Techno didn’t turn around.

The beast gripped the stained handles of the mottled cellar doors and yanked them open with little fanfare. Tommy winced, covering his mouth with his sleeve at the buzz of flies and stench of something deeply rotting. He glanced back at the forest with the faintest bit of hope, but there was no sign of Wilbur anywhere. God, Techno really was the worst. Almost as bad as the smell.

“In,” it commanded, holding open the doors, and god fucking damnit, Tommy really didn’t want to.

“I-“

“In.”

“But-“

“In.”

Fuck.

Tommy grimaced, and pulled the collar of his shirt over his nose before taking hesitant steps forward. Here, he was positioned under Techno’s arm as the beast held open the sagging door, and he could squint, through the dim light, to see the glimmer of jars and metal tools, and the faint outline of a rough wooden workbench and shelves. Lots of shelves. Tommy was pretty sure those were eyeballs glinting at him from the darkness. And that was totally a drain in the floor, with dark stains all around it on the stone and soaked into the wood of the walls.

“I-“ he began again, because god fuck he really didn’t want to go in there, but as he inhaled, the stench all at once became overpowering. Not just the rot and decomposing flesh, but also the strong sting and bile of chemicals. Whatever words he tried to get out quickly broke down into hacking, and Tommy found himself stumbling away as his chest convulsed.

One second he was on his feet, and the next he was in the grass, crutches forgotten in favour of his coughing fit and fucking breathing again. Shit, the hacking was sharp and harsh and it took a good minute to get under control. By that point his hands were wet with petals and blood, and when Tommy blurrily glanced back up, the beast was watching him with its skull tilted to the side.

“In,” it said, but it sounded less sure about that statement.

Tommy, one arm curled around his aching chest, held up a finger to signal the thing to wait a fucking minute. He bore through another round of the fit, before he could get enough air in his lungs to speak. “I can’t- can’t breathe in there.”

The beast was still holding the door open. “If you are scared-“

“-No, fuck you,” Tommy mumbled, and he flopped back in the grass, before immediately curling on his side at more coughing. It was like he could still feel the sting of the chemicals, irritating the flowers, and the way the blood had clogged his airways. “I can’t breathe. The air is fucking- fucking rancid ‘n stale ‘n shit in there.”

He watched through half lidded eyes as the monster took in this information, glancing at Tommy before it turned and peered into the cellar. “... I don’t have a nose.”

Not a fact Tommy was expecting to learn today, but whatever. “Yeah well I have one, and a set of lungs full of-“ Break for another cough. “-flowers, so you’ll have to take my word for it. I can barely fucking breathe on a regular basis, I can’t- Fuck. The air is really bad in there.”

With a huff that Tommy thought was way too dramatic, the monster let the cellar doors slam shut, and came marching over. It crouched beside him, still a lumbering form, and Tommy closed his eyes and tried not to flinch when he felt a ragged claw poke at his face.

“Are you okay?” the beast asked, and Tommy wrinkled his nose.

“Why the fuck would you ask me that?” he hissed, and his voice broke into a rasp halfway through. Ow.

“Because I’m interested in the answer?” Techno offered. “Are you okay?”

“Fuck off.”

Techno, did not in fact, fuck off. What a prick.

Instead, heavy hands pressed against Tommy’s back, helping him up into a sitting position and settling him against the same tree stump from before. The blunt, blood-stained axe was uncomfortably close to his face, but Tommy opted to ignore it.

“Since when are you so- so soft or whatever,” he grumbled, curling his arms around his aching middle, and offering the best general glare he could manage.

Just as he suspected, the boar skull tilted to the side, mostly clean save for the bits of dried tissue in the furrows of the bone. “Phil started using a new fabric softener a few weeks ago,” it suggested.

Tommy paused. “That is... That is not what I asked at all.”

Techno didn’t respond.

Tommy groaned and leaned his head back. “You’re fucking with me, aren’t you?”

“No.” *Yes.*

Tommy blinked, then stared up at the sky as he re-evaluated his entire perspective of the monster. Just. Huh.

He continued to sit there, even as he heard Techno stand up and the creak of the cellar doors opening. He scrunched his nose and coughed into his sleeve, and by the time his breathing evened out Techno was back, setting a rough wooden box full of jars on the ground near him with a deafening rattle of glass.

Tommy peered at their contents, and he was pretty sure half the jars were just entirely blood. The rest at least had something floating in them.

“I have a few things to show you,” Techno began, settling in the grass and pulling the box closer to itself to riffle through it. “It would’ve been easier to show you inside my workshop, but I suppose this’ll have to do.”



It then reached in and pulled out something wrapped in a stained cloth, and upon revealing it, Tommy's brain had to work for a moment to identify exactly what he was looking at. A lump of glistening, pink and purple flesh, with cut tubes. Oh.

A human heart.

"From what I understand you're going to be staying," Techno began, the heart dwarfed in its massive clawed hand as it made a gesture like a poet holding a skull. "So I decided to do some investigative journalism. Take a look."

Oh cool, Techno was now offering him the human heart, and oh wow, Tommy was holding out his hands to accept it. Wild.

He grimaced a bit at the wet, gummy texture as the organ was rolled into his palms. It had a weight to it, slumped and unresponsive, residue soaking into the bandages on his hands.

"What do you notice?" Techno prompted, and it was hovering over Tommy a bit too closely, but it smelled less like decay and more like dirt today, so Tommy tolerated it.

"It's... wet?" Tommy offered. "Uh, a bit cold." He hesitated. "This is Dream's, isn't it?"

"Obviously," Techno grunted. "Here, do you see it?"

It pointed, and Tommy followed its finger to the set of severed tubes near the top of the heart. He ignored the bit of his brain that was unfocusing just a bit, at holding a piece of someone in his hands. He shouldn't- He'd done this before, he shouldn't be surprised anymore. "Uh, tubes?"

"Arteries. What about them?" Techno prompted more, and Tommy's stomach churned uncomfortably at being asked for an answer he didn't know. Especially when Techno was making it seem like it was something he could figure out.

"...They're wet?"

The beast rocked away from him just a bit, and there was a short, soft huff from behind the skull. "Have you, uh, ever seen a heart before kid?"

Tommy stared at it. "Uh, no. Literally when the fuck would I have."

"I don't know," Techno grunted. "Humans murder and dissect each other on occasion, don't they?"

"Not really."

"Oh."

"Yeah."

They both sat there for a moment, staring at the cold, limp organ in Tommy's hands. Then Techno was reaching forward, prying a finger into the heart. "Actually I'm realising it would

probably make more sense with a demonstration.”

“What are- What the fuck!” Tommy yelped, flinching as suddenly the heart in his hands *convulsed*. The muscles moved with a solid, jerking motion, expanding and contracting like a goddamn jellyfish or something.

The heart was beating.

Then, the heart started bleeding.

Blood spurted out the ends of arteries in time with the convulsions, splattering over the lawn and Tommy’s clean shirt and over the bone of the boar skull. Fuck. Fuck the heart was *warm* now.

“You should be able to notice it better,” Techno was saying, pointing with a clawed, meaty finger at the tubes again.

“I don’t-“ Tommy said, because his hands were soaked in warm blood and there was a moving, rubbery organ in his grip. “What?”

“These arteries are showing signs that there’s a weakened valve,” Techno said patiently, reaching out and stabilizing Tommy’s hands from where they were shaking. “I suppose it’s a bit hard to notice now, this early, but within the next few years your guardian would’ve started showing symptoms and had to get the valve replaced.”

Tommy stared at it, at the beating heart in his loose grip, and at some point pieces of his brain started to return to him. His stomach was clenched uncomfortably, but he forced himself to take a breath, then coughed to the side into his elbow. “So he would’ve... what? Gotten surgery?”

Techno shrugged with a large roll of its shoulders. “Sure. If it was noticed.”

“Oh.”

That was a thought now. So this entire time Dream was vulnerable. Had a living weakness inside of him, and some part of Tommy’s brain was screaming in frustration. If he had just waited a bit longer. Just a few more years, this could have been exploitable, right? This could’ve ended badly for Dream. But it was always that. A hope and an idle promise that he just needed to wait a little more... Just a few more years, and then- And then what? He’d age out of the system? Dream might get hospitalized? Dream might let him go? He’d stumble upon some magical scenario where he could get away?

But Tommy never had a few more years. He’d barely had days.

“I’m not entirely sure what the risks are or if it’s heritable,” Techno continued, oblivious to Tommy’s sharp inhale and subsequent coughing. “But I figured it was better to bring it up now so we could plan for the possibility. A faulty heart valve would pose a problem towards keeping you alive. I haven’t found any other major health concerns yet, just a few small things, but I’m still combing through the remains so... why are you looking at me like that?”

Tommy blinked, wiping the petals from his mouth, then blinked again in an effort to focus. "I- Wait, you showed me his heart because you think mine might be the same way?"

"Might be," Techno replied with a huff. "I was hoping you could tell me if this was heritable or not, or maybe Phil might know. If Wilbur's going to keep you I figured I could do my part and make sure you don't die from bad anatomy years down the road."

"Years," Tommy echoed weakly. "That's uh, thinking a bit far ahead, isn't it?"

"Yeah, well, someone has to," Techno complained, letting go of the heart in order to fold his arms, causing the organ to fall still in Tommy's palms, dripping and sticky, but with no more muscle spasms and no unnatural heat that seeped into him. "So, thoughts?"

Tommy looked at the tissue in his hands again, then back up at Techno. "You know me and Dream aren't related, right?"

Techno's skull tilted to the side. "Human kids are related to their parents, aren't they?"

"I don't have parents," Tommy informed him.

"Then," Techno stared at the box of jars filled with body parts beside them. "Then who's this?"

They both took a minute to consider.

"Dream?" Tommy offered.

"So he's," Techno made an aborted gesture. "Just some human that lives in your house?"

"It's- When a kid doesn't have parents or whatever to look after them, then someone else usually fosters or adopts them. Dream was... Dream adopted me, so he's my guardian, but we aren't related," Tommy clarified.

"Oh," Techno said after a minute. "Oh, I'll just. I'll just put that back." It carefully picked up the heart from Tommy's hands, wrapping it in cloth before putting it in the box. Then scooted the box farther away with a foot. Then a little farther again. "Uh, do you have any medical records I can look at then? Any relatives I can take apart?"

"No," Tommy answered shortly, scowling as he scrubbed at his face where he could feel a thick bead of blood dripping down, wincing when he ended up smearing it. God, he looked like something out of a horror movie now, sticky with drying splatters of blood. "Why are you so- so obsessed with this anyway? I'm not- I don't have years. This doesn't exactly matter."

"You said you were going to live."

Tommy sucked in a breath. "I am but I don't- You're thinking about years from now and I don't- That doesn't make any sense."

Techno said nothing.

Tommy scowled and crossed his arms, ignoring the squelch of the blood sunk deep into the fabric of his borrowed shirt. His fingers pressed in a little deeper, and he could feel the blood drying beneath his nails. All at once, he tried to say it in stutters. "I've only- I've only ever had months, or weeks, or days. I don't- I don't get years. I've never had years."

He'd wished he'd had years. When he was younger that was all he could think about. This many years until he would age out of the system. This many years until he could get away, be someone, do something... This many years until he could get away from Dream, even if a part of himself huddled in a corner listening for footsteps without being able to breathe realised with a sort of settled dread and acceptance that Dream would never let him get away. Even as the hanahaki got worse, until he was sat in the hospital, staring at the floor and his newly broken leg, listening to the doctor list off an estimation after they'd gone ahead and checked his lungs. If nothing got better, this was how long he'd have left.

Then, Tommy stopped having years.

He'd known before all that, in a way that never really registered. He'd researched hanahaki, he knew the risks, he knew the numbers and the statistics and the averages. He could've had years. He could've had years he could've had years he could've- until he didn't anymore.

Then he had months which turned to weeks, and when he choked on a perfect allium, a full bulb that sat smothered in his hands, he had a day. He had hours, minutes, seconds.

"Well," the beast said after a moment. It reached forward, leaned, until the thick tip of its claw pressed into Tommy's chest, where his lungs dipped shallowly in and out. "Now you can have years."

*Now you have years.*

For a moment, that was all there was.

The pressure that dug in when he breathed, the sharpness against his brain stuttering at the edges. A prodding claw, his own staticked mind, and the thought that drifted endlessly on into a place Tommy couldn't follow.

It was like everything was at a halt. Like there was too much and nothing all at once. Like the only things left were a promise and a sharp point against his chest.

Carefully, it all pieced itself back together, and Techno removed his claw.

"I can't- I don't think I can think in years," Tommy said, as soon as he could breathe again, voice going soft. "It's... I don't think I can imagine keeping myself alive for years. It doesn't- that doesn't even make sense."

"What about months then? Can you think in months?"

Tommy grimaced, letting out a trembling exhale as he shook his head.

"A week," Techno said. "Can you see yourself alive in a week?"

Despite himself, Tommy answered. “Yeah.”

“Then focus on that,” Techno continued easily. “Keep yourself alive for a week, and we’ll have a party or something to celebrate. We can work our way up to years.”

“Years,” Tommy echoed.

“Years.”

“Oh,” Tommy said. “Alright then.”

“Good talk,” Techno agreed, heaving himself to his feet. He offered out a hand to Tommy and- and despite himself Tommy took it, hissing in surprise as he was hefted up almost effortlessly. Then Techno let him lean against him, until he was able to scoop up his crutches and fit them beneath his shoulders. “I’ll escort you back to the house, and then we can pretend this excursion never happened.”

“I’m covered in blood.”

“Wilbur won’t notice.”

But as they stepped into the door’s threshold, Techno paused again. He was standing in the way, so Tommy was forced to stop as well and glare up at the monster.

“I uh, had a final question about adoption,” Techno admitted.

Tommy rolled his eyes, shifting his weight off his right leg. “Sure.”

“So, Dream, your guardian, chose to adopt you then,” Techno said, very slowly, like he was sounding out each syllable. “To replace having human parents, who would’ve taken care of you otherwise. If Dream... was.... your caretaker, then... why did he do this to you?”

Techno set a hand overtop of Tommy’s, the one that had a palm sliced open by glass. The hand that Tommy had shown him days ago.

It was like there was ice, scratching down Tommy’s throat, sitting heavily in his stomach, sending discomfort through his veins. Tommy tried to answer it, once, twice, but. But he pulled that hand off his crutches, holding it out in front of him and folding back his fingers. The palm was wrapped right now, beneath the bandage Wilbur had given him last night, but just flexing it allowed for a low stinging ache.

“Not everyone adopts a kid to care for them, I guess. I’ve been- I’ve been fostered a lot, been through a lot of caretakers, and there’s always bad and good but I’m not good enough for the good and- and Dream was the worst of them,” Tommy said, maybe a bit too quickly, maybe all in one breath, but he felt like he was choking. “And he was the one I couldn’t escape.”

“Why not?”

A stuttered hitch of his breath, and Tommy almost broke down coughing, but he swallowed the urge, the tightness, and pressed his eyes closed. When he looked at Techno again, into

what he thought were eyes beyond the sockets, he was steadier. “Because Dream was smart. He- He started out nice, kept- kept making himself out to be the good guy so that I wouldn’t leave and then... Then it was just too late and I couldn’t- He made sure I could never leave at all.”

Tommy paused, sucked in a breath, and this time he had to look away.

“It’s not as easy to escape as you’d think.”

Techno took it in with silence, before carefully, he pried the door open a little wider, and stepped out of the way so that Tommy could get by.

“If you didn’t hate me,” the beast said quietly. “Did you hate him?”

Tommy already knew the answer.

Because Dream was an inevitability. Sure, he’d made Tommy’s life a living hell, but other people had too. If it wasn’t Dream, then it was someone else. A different house. A different foster parent. A different bruise. If it wasn’t Dream, then someone else would’ve triggered the hanahaki, would’ve infected and clogged his lungs, and that would be it. At some point, it stopped being personal and started being inevitable. If it wasn’t Dream, then Tommy would’ve died a different way. He wouldn’t hate the ocean for drowning him.

“No. I didn’t hate Dream.”

*I just feared him.*

They sat back down at the table, across the chess board from each other. Tommy stared at it, one single pawn having been moved from its row into an empty battlefield. Now, Techno took his turn, and a second pawn was set out two spaces, leaving behind a rook.

“You know,” Tommy said idly, moving the pawn in front of his king in a half-assed strategy. “It’s dumb, but I- but this is probably the least worst adoption I’ve ever been through.”

Techno blinked at him, stunned enough that when he moved another pawn away from his bishop, Tommy hesitated, because Techno did not just leave his king open like that. “Is this- I thought Wilbur kidnapped you. Did he- Did he human adopt you?”

Immediately Tommy felt his ears go red and his cheeks heat. “I- No! Fuck you! Wilbur still fucking kidnapped me, dick, and I’ll fucking find a way to be unadopted you fuck, just watch!”

Then Tommy slammed his hand down, and simultaneously, slammed his queen across the board. “Also fuck you again, check mate!”

In case you're curious the checkmate at the end was based on that one chess game Schlatt lost in two moves, because it lives in my brain rent free.

Tommy: I don't hate Dream. I can't hate something that's inevitable. That's like hating the ocean for drowning me, fire for burning me, rocks for breaking my bones.

Techno: ah, so the mental health is going well

Fanart:

-[Wimblr my beloved](#) (tw trypophobia)

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# Quadruple Cross Backstitch Your Way Into My Heart

## Chapter Summary

Tommy is subject to an impromptu sewing lesson.

## Chapter Notes

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, MAJOR sewing/needle imagery, gore, body horror, horror elements, dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, referenced past child abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The first thing Tommy saw the next morning was a monster sewing its skin back together.

Well, no, wasn't actually the first thing he saw. Technically, Tommy woke up under a warm nest of blankets to the sight of Wilbur, which was apparently the new norm and a feature of life that was making the top ten list of things he hated most. The monster was asleep sitting on the floor again, his head pillowed by arms folded on Tommy's bed. Since Wilbur's eyes were closed and his breathing slow, Tommy took it as a sign that he wouldn't be waking up any time soon.

Last night had been... weird. A repeat of something uncomfortable.

Wilbur had been dumb and hovering and loud since he came back to find Tommy covered in blood, but at least he brought the blankets this time, so Tommy could tolerate him. Thank fuck Tommy had been able to get another bath, but there was still dried blood in his scalp that he could never seem to get out.

After that Wilbur refused to leave him alone all evening, and as he had done before, fell asleep in the attic with him. Tommy very purposefully did not think very hard about that.

It also made it easier to force himself out of bed, quietly, like trying not to wake Dream. His feet touched the floor, and staying off his leg most of the day had improved the pain from a sharp stab to the usual background ache. He pushed himself off the bed, and Wilbur grumbled but didn't wake.

Getting downstairs was trickier. Tommy considered his crutches, but tossing them down like he usually did would definitely wake Wilbur up, and there was no elegant or painless way to



carry them down so... he'd probably be alright limping without them for a bit?

He breathed shallowly as he supported himself down the ladder, grimacing as the journey never got easier. Carefully, silently, he made it to the floor with the barest of thuds from his feet, and leaned against the rungs to keep his weight shifted to his left leg.

The only noise besides his slightly heavier breathing, Tommy realised, was humming. Louder now that he was downstairs, and instantly Tommy zoned in on the source.

There, in the armchair by the bookshelf, was the not-man. Rocking gently and humming, veil fluttering with the sunlight from the open windows. It had its sleeve pulled up to the elbow, and with the other hand it wielded a long, twisted bronze needle with a length of thread belonging to a spool on the end table.

Tommy watched, aware of his own shallow breaths and the loud thumps of his heart, as that needle dipped down into the stretch of flesh along Phil's forearm, and pulled taught into a stitch.

Distantly, Tommy realised he could see the glint of the metal wires underneath, and that a little more was hidden as another stitch was added. There were strips of something uncomfortably thick and meaty lying on the end table beside Phil, and Tommy tried very hard not to recognize human flesh when he saw it.

He cleared his throat, loudly and purposefully, and closed his eyes against the sight of that twisted, hooked needle ducking into skin a third time. "Do I even want to know what you're doing?"

Yet to his surprise, the not-man stopped humming, and as Tommy watched through a cracked eye, it actively pulled its sleeve back down, hiding its work. "Oh, Tommy, sorry about that. I didn't hear you get up."

"I... what the fuck are you sorry for?" Tommy groused, heading to the wall so he could use it for balance as he shuffled over. Even more confusingly, Phil started tying off the thread after the quick snip of bronze scissors, fitting the needle snugly into the spool before it snapped up the strips of skin and threw them into a knitting basket at its feet.

"I thought you would be asleep for longer. I didn't mean for you to see this," Phil admitted at a clipped pace, packing up with an efficiency that left Tommy stunned.

"Is- Is this not some part of your master plan to intimidate me into being nice to Wilbur?" Tommy asked.

"Oh," Phil said. "Well, no, I was just doing maintenance and I've heard it's pretty unpleasant to witness, so. I was trying to be courteous."

Now, a sane person would probably take the explanation and dip, but Tommy was tired and also maybe vaguely just a bit curious, even if the thought made him queasy. "Well, I don't really give a shit. So you can keep doing what you're doing if you want."

“Oh,” Phil said, on its feet, but at Tommy’s admission it sank back into the armchair. “I might have to take you up on the offer. I need to get this finished so I can run errands tonight.”

“...And those two things are related how?” Tommy muttered as he looked away, watching out of the corner of his eye as the not-man rolled up its sleeve again.

“Well, I can’t exactly go buy groceries the way I am,” Phil said idly, unspooling some thread. “With new skin I can pass as human for a bit”

“I’m going to call bullshit, but I also can’t picture you grocery shopping,” Tommy admitted, focusing on making his way closer along the walls, until he could push off and hobble over to the couch to sit down, closer to Phil, and definitely not morbidly curious to see what it was doing.

“How did you think I got the meat for soup?”

“I honestly just wasn’t going to ask.”

Phil hummed, twisting in the needle again, and Tommy winced and looked away.

For a moment, it was just the sound of the thread and the gentle punctures, before Phil spoke again. “It doesn’t hurt, you know.”

“What?”

“The sewing. It doesn’t hurt me,” Phil adjusted itself then, pulling up its sleeve a little more. “If that’s what’s giving you that face. Kri- a friend of mine used to have the same expression when I sewed. I told her it doesn't hurt me but... I believe it’s just an innate fear in humans, isn’t it? I haven’t given it much thought, but it seems to be less the sensation and more the imagery. I myself have exploited it so much with prey in the past, but...”

Tommy blinked slowly at it, before sinking back down into the couch and throwing an arm over his face. “Can you have one conversation with me that isn’t vaguely threatening?”

“I’m not threatening you, mate.”

“I’m pretty sure you just implied you were going to stab me with a needle.”

There was a sound, and Tommy wrinkled his nose when he realised it was an amused huff. Well, fuck Phil. “I’m not sure you’d have the skin to be a sewing project.” Holy shit, fuck Phil!

“Fuck off, I have great skin,” Tommy snapped, shooting a glare, then wincing and turning away.

“Sure you do, mate.”

“At least my skin doesn’t fucking clump,” Tommy hissed, and at that Phil let out another chuckle, and its hat jittered at the movement.

“Oh to be young and have flowing blood and living cells,” Phil lamented. “To not have to deal with the rot.”

“Have you ever considered that maybe your skin is just terrible?” Tommy said.

“...Well, it’s not exactly my skin.”

Tommy could practically feel himself losing brain cells at this point, and his eyes roved over the room for some kind of distraction, but found nothing besides studying the knitted patterns in Phil’s sewing bag, and watching out of the corner of the eye as the seam in Phil’s forearm grew, the skin stitched snugly together.

“Have you ever considered giving it a try?” Phil said then, and Tommy blinked from where he’d been staring out the window and letting sunspots gather against his eyelids.

“What, wearing other people’s skin?”

“Sewing. Have you ever considered giving sewing a try?” Phil corrected patiently, and Tommy twisted so he was sitting back up on the couch with a cough to his elbow. “Like, normal human sewing.”

Tommy stared at it for a moment. “Do I look like a person who has hobbies?”

“No, but you do look bored.”

Well, couldn’t argue with it there.

“I’m not sewing skin,” he decided.

“Of course not,” Phil agreed. “That’s high quality material, and tough to push the needle through, especially for a beginner. We’ll start with paper and then find you some fabric.”

Phil was the fucking worst, Tommy decided.

It continued to be the worst, even after it put away its current sewing project, snipping the thread that kept its flesh together with its pair of bronze scissors, in order to go find some paper. Then, it pulled over the coffee table in front of the couch, placing down the sewing supplies.

“Now, the paper is just a warmup while you get a better idea of what you’re doing, so after a few practice runs I found some felt fabric that’ll be easy to work with,” Phil explained, threading a needle with eerie precision before handing it over to Tommy. Tommy, for his part, hesitated for just a moment, checking to see if Phil was going to stab him or not, and when it didn’t, he accepted the needle, examining it.

It was small, thin and silver, and difficult to pinch between his fingers. A long black thread, thicker than what Phil had been using, dangled from it, and Tommy looked up to find Phil threading its own needle, the long twisting one it had been using to sew its skin shut.

Finally, it handed Tommy a sheet of paper. Tommy stared at it for a moment, then accepted, and without preamble stabbed his needle into the sheet. The paper ripped accordingly. He pulled the needle through, and then stabbed it again.

“Would you like to learn how to tie the end of the thread so it doesn’t slip through?” Phil said amicably, working neatly on its own sheet of paper.

“No,” Tommy said, and stabbed another hole.

“Mate-”

“Sorry, can’t hear you over the sound of my new hobby.”

There was a sudden clacking, sort of squealing noise, and Tommy glanced up to see that Phil’s wings had flicked out just a bit from under its cloak, and were shuddering and grating while little bits of metal twitched forward like it- like it was fucking ruffling its feathers.

Pointedly, Tommy grabbed the end of the thread, and used it to tie a knot around one of the loops. Phil stared at him, and Tommy continued stabbing his paper. Then, he got a bit too aggressive, pulling the stitches taught, and simultaneously, ripping through the entire sheet. Fuck.

Tommy stared at his paper, now ripped open and full of holes, and glanced up at Phil. “Ready for the felt fabric, then?” it said, and that was all it said. Tommy waited for worse. Waited for yelling telling him he’d fucked up. Waited for the snarky comment back, but all Phil did was rethread Tommy’s needle, and hand him a square of yellow felt.

This time, when Phil demonstrated how to knot the thread so the stitches would stay, Tommy quietly copied. Then, he was stitching the border of the fabric, pinching the needle tightly between his fingers. He only needed to glance up once to see Phil’s work, and well, fuck Phil. The monster’s stitches were neat, even, and carefully small, doing little loops in the corners of the felt. Tommy’s, in comparison, were loose and large and carelessly done. He grimaced, and did another stitch.

Then, his fucking hand shook, twitched, spasmed, and the little needle slipped, falling to the floor. “Fuck,” he grumbled, and picked it up again. Fuck. His hand was starting to shake as he worked, and the needle was so fucking small, and his fingers hurt from how hard he was pinching them together. He gritted his teeth, and tried to pretend the trembling wasn’t in tune with the throbbing of his leg.

“Fuck!” he hissed, louder now, the fourth time he dropped the needle, which happened after the third time he stabbed his fucking finger. He scooped it back up off the floor, and grimaced at the way his hand was hurting just a bit. He was already tired, and he hadn’t finished stitching the borders of his felt square.

“This is dumb,” he decided all at once, tossing the needle and felt onto the table. Phil glanced up from its work, and it had long since stopped decorating its own felt, and had moved on to beginning to stitch together the skin on its other arm. “Fuck sewing.”

Phil's veil twitched up, the grating of its feathers sounding from behind it. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong is that this is the dumbest fucking hobby to ruin all hobbies," Tommy retorted, sinking back into the couch with a huff and a folding of his arms. "So of course it's your favourite."

The hat and veil tilted just a bit more, almost threatening to slip off the monster's head. "Do you want me to get you a bigger needle?"

Tommy blinked. "There's bigger needles?"

"The small ones are easier to push through fabric, but can be a bit hard to handle," Phil explained, already reaching into its sewing bag to rifle around. "Big ones are easier to thread, but harder to push through sometimes. It should be fine with the felt though."

Tommy accepted the needle that was handing to him, and stared at it for a moment, because... huh. It was a lot bigger, a lot nicer to roll between his fingers, and he could even clearly see through the eye of it. "Can I... Can I try threading it?"

"Sure, mate."

It, alright, it still wasn't fucking easy, and Phil obviously staring at him wasn't helping, but Tommy was committed as he hunched over, squinting, trying to rest his hands on his legs so they wouldn't shake so much. Finally, the damned thread that kept fraying at the edges slipped through where it was supposed to, and Tommy had successfully threaded a needle.

Suffice to say, his stitches didn't look much nicer, but they were easier to do, and he didn't drop this needle quite as much. That didn't mean his hands didn't tremble, and his fingertips didn't feel sore from pushing the needle and from getting stabbed, but Tommy was able to persevere.

Finally, Phil showed him how to tie off the thread, and then his little square of felt yellow fabric had its stitched black border. That Tommy did. On his own.

"Tomorrow we can try stitching two felt pieces together," Phil said, giving a few small claps to humour Tommy when he presented his square.

"Fuck yeah- Wait, tomorrow?" He lowered the felt back onto his lap, his success making him bolder. "Why not now?"

"You need to give your hands a break, mate," Phil said amicably.

"My hands are fine," Tommy retorted, shoulders hunching, but Phil just hummed. "I can keep going."

"You could, but it's best not to."

"I said I'm fine-"

“I know,” Phil interrupted. “I’ve said the same thing to myself before. But sometimes it’s... best, to let yourself rest.”

Tommy bit his lip, but let the argument go, knowing better than to push his luck. They weren't- The monsters weren't Dream, but there was always something nauseating about starting arguments that could spiral into something more. He sunk back down into the couch with his arms crossed instead, glaring at Phil. The not-man considered him for a moment more, its ragged nails tapping against its arm, before it apparently came to a decision.

It moved abruptly, gripping one of its own fingers and quickly with a sickening tear, twisted away the skin. Tommy had all of a moment for his mind to process, before Phil was discarding the peeled flesh and leaning forward to show Tommy the gore beneath.

Well, if gore was a bloody wire skeleton. The exposed finger had metal bones and metal joints with bits of sinew stuck between, tipped with what looked like a ragged scissor blade. Thin threads looped through tiny hooks along the appendage, and when some threads went taught, the finger flexed.

“Sometimes the joints rust, clog up, or loosen if I don’t take proper care of them,” Phil explained in a measured voice. “And I’ve had quite a long time to learn that lesson. When it happens, and it does, I always get sort of... frustrated, when my stitches aren’t neat. When the blade shakes. When things slip from my grasp. So I’m not telling you this from nothing when I say it’s best to give your body rest when it needs it. I’ve pushed myself to the point of falling apart enough times to know that some times it’s better to simply pace yourself, and give your body the chance to catch up.”

Tommy stared at the skeleton of the finger, fleshless, with bits of gore clinging to and around the metal joints. It moved so sinuously now, that Tommy had a hard time picturing it, but Phil sounded sincere.

Then, he looked down at his own hands, curled into fists in his lap, fingers aching, trembling with a deep-seated and familiar exhaustion. Everything was always just... aching. Sore and shaking and painful.

But Tommy was always resting. He didn’t want to rest anymore, for once he just wanted to not be tired, to be able to move and run like his body wasn't broken and clogged with flowers. Like his life wasn't at a knife's edge, so close to just slipping away if he breathed wrong... but Tommy rarely ever got what he wanted.

And now, he also didn’t want the sharp pain and trembles that he knew would come with picking up a needle again. However, if he didn't there was no guarantee Phil would act on its promise. That it would ever allow him to sew again. There was never a guarantee these monsters would do anything (but they always did).

“Tomorrow,” he said hesitantly, voice quiet in the air, knowing that in the end, as with most things, he never really had a choice. It was already decided for him.

“Tomorrow,” Phil agreed. “And after that I can teach you different stitches, if you’re still interested.”

“Alright.”

Then, for a moment, that was it.

Tommy pulled his legs up onto the couch, curling around them as he turned to stare out one window, felt square clutched lightly in one hand. Phil went back to its sewing, piercing strips of skin with the long twisting needle. It started humming again, and Tommy closed his eyes, and just listened.

Then-

“What are you doing?”

The third voice was flat, careful, and Tommy jolted for a reason he couldn't name, twisting to look over the back of the couch to see Wilbur standing at the base of the ladder. His eyes were on Phil, not Tommy, but it didn't matter much when Tommy realised that Wilbur looked... irritated. Eyes flashing, mouth turned down, but it wasn't with the petulant whine that sometimes arose. Tommy hadn't seen Wilbur like this before, and just for a moment something twisted, nauseous with uncertainty, before Tommy clamped down on it and shifted his expression to unimpressed.

“Uh, getting a hobby, unlike you, dickhead.”

Wilbur's eyes flashed to him briefly. “No, not you, I- Phil. What are you doing?”

Phil didn't seem perturbed at least, sitting comfortably in its armchair with a spiraling needle wedged into the thick flesh of its arm. “Sewing.”

Wilbur took a step forward, carefully, still staring at Phil. “In front of him?”

Finally, the needle stilled just a bit. “He's alright with it, mate. He's also been sewing something of his own.”

“I improved a square,” Tommy piped up, as he showed Wilbur his little yellow felt piece. “Also, Phil traumatised me.”

Wilbur's gaze, which had softened with confusion at the sight of the fabric, twisted again to Phil. “Seriously?”

“It's just a little sewing mate, that's not traumatising,” Phil protested.

“I'm incredibly traumatised,” Tommy insisted, deadpan, then gestured. “Look at my face, it holds so much trauma. I simply don't think I can recover from this.”

Wilbur stared at him for a moment more, before his shoulders slumped and he pressed a hand against his forehead. “You're making it difficult to understand what's actually traumatising.”

“Your face,” Tommy offered. “Your face has given me severe trauma. I'm going to sew you.”

“I... like sue as in legally, or sew as in with a needle?” Wilbur asked, then shook his head. “Actually never mind, fuck this conversation. I need your help moving some boxes in the attic. I think there’s a couch buried underneath them.”

“Uh, why is there a couch in the attic?” Tommy asked.

“Why is anything in the attic?” Wilbur countered. “Just get up there and help me.”

“Why can’t Phil go?”

“He won’t want to ruin his skin before shopping,” Wilbur said dismissively.

“It’s true,” Phil interjected. “This takes long enough as is.”

Tommy showed both of them his middle fingers, just so they were aware, then pulled himself off the couch, grimacing at the sharp sting in his leg and the fact that he didn’t have his crutches. It was back to using the wall as support, shuffling over to Wilbur and then staring up at the ladder. God he hated this ladder so fucking much.

He hauled himself into the attic, squinting around the dim room for something that looked like a couch. Cardboard boxes, plastic bins, and old storage trunks were stacked too thick for him to find it. He scowled, his arms already tingling from just the strain of sewing. Fuck Wilbur, the monster totally didn’t need his help.

The trapdoor slammed shut behind him.

Tommy whirled, something like panic clawing at his gut, because the trapdoor was never shut- but no, it was just the bitch, looking down at the trapdoor like it personally offended him.

“I’m pretty sure your couch is a pipedream,” Tommy stated helpfully to Wilbur’s back. “You’ve been misled. Inhaled too much attic dust. Fuck, does this place has asbestos? It totally does, doesn’t it?”

“Tommy,” Wilbur said, and Tommy shut up again. He didn’t like it, whatever was in Wilbur’s tone, and he carefully moved himself to the side and out of the way, back to his bed, knees pulled up to his chest even if it was harder to breathe.

He coughed, briefly but raggedly into his arm, tears pricking at his eyes with the usual convulsions of his chest. When he stopped, Wilbur was looking at him again, quiet and with the closed attic door behind him.

“What do you want?” Tommy said, keeping his voice flat and tired, just the way it always was, even as something fluttered uncertain in his gut.

“Are you okay?” Wilbur asked, and suddenly all that uncertainty dissipated. Fuck that question, Tommy was getting tired of it- “Phil didn’t hurt you, did he?”

-Wilbur could stick his question up his-! Oh. Oh that was a new one.



“What?” Tommy repeated, watching as Wilbur ran a hand up through his hair again, too long fingers curling back along his skull.

“Did Phil- Fuck, you already saw him with the needle, and he wasn’t even hiding it, so that’s fucked but he didn’t- he didn’t touch you, right? He didn’t hurt you?” Wilbur pressed, moved forward another foot more, and Tommy’s back pressed further into the bedframe.

“Why do you care?” Tommy said slowly, and didn’t like the way Wilbur seemed broken at that response.

“Because I’m supposed to?” Wilbur stressed. “Because I promised you? Fuck, I don’t- What did he say to you? What was Phil talking to you about? If he crossed any line I’ll fucking find Techno’s cleaver, I swear-”

“Wilbur,” Tommy said, louder than he meant, and firmer too, but he reminded himself that it was fine. Wilbur wasn’t supposed to hurt him. “What the fuck are you talking about? Phil didn’t do anything! I don’t care about sewing needles.”

“But he did something last time,” Wilbur shot back. Tommy hesitated, mind flashing back, but that still didn’t- “The other night when you... when you were acting weird, you mentioned him. You said he was right about how the flowers were your fault. And you were alone with him before, which must have been when he said it. What-? What did he say to you?” There was a tremour at the end, but Tommy wasn’t paying attention.

“I was tired, Wilbur, I don’t know what I said to you that night. I was also under the impression that we weren’t going to fucking talk about it,” Tommy hissed. “Why are you bringing it up?”

“Stop,” Wilbur said, and it was harsh again. Tommy ignored the nausea rising in his stomach. “Stop deflecting like that. You always do that, so why won’t you- I promised I’d care about you, so why won’t you let me?”

“Because nothing fucking happened, that’s why. Phil didn’t do anything.”

“Bullshit!” Wilbur snarled, mouth cracking open just a fraction wider than it should, splitting some skin, and Tommy’s heart jumped again, but it was so far away, but they were alone and the door was closed and Tommy knew what no witnesses meant- No. This was Wilbur. This was just fucking Wilbur, and he might be a complete prick but he wasn’t dangerous. Not to Tommy. “Every time I’ve left you with them something happens! When you’re alone with Techno you end up covered in blood, and whenever you’re alone with Phil you’re- something’s wrong, and you keep trying to protect them but you won’t let me protect you!”

“I don’t need protecting!” Tommy protested, forcing his voice to rise in volume as well, even if it was weak and raspy and breaking against his raw throat. “They didn’t do anything to me! What, are you just never going to leave me alone then? Is that your plan?”

“You asked me to stay,” Wilbur said pointedly.

“Yeah, because I’m tired of being fucking alone! That wasn’t an invitation to hover and- and- and assume I’ll never be okay on my own. Yeah, fuck, things happen, but you’re all monsters so of course shits going to be fucked! It’s fine Wilbur, they didn’t do anything,” Tommy repeated.

“I’m just trying to keep you safe!”

Tommy stiffened, and his breathing cut out.

Fuck. Fuck, it was fine, Wilbur didn’t mean it, Wilbur wasn’t Dream but... but... everything Dream had done had always been for Tommy’s safety. His leg was hurt, he needed to stay in the house so he was safe. The hanahaki was getting worse, he needed to stay in his room so he was safe. The windows needed to be closed, so he was safe. *‘I’m just trying to keep you safe, Tommy.’*

“What’s your plan, then?” Tommy asked very, very slowly. His voice felt like it was coming from a different person. “Are you just going to keep me locked in the attic? Keep me away from other people? Keep me safe?”

Wilbur opened his mouth but Tommy was quick to cut him off.

“I would think very, very carefully about your answer, Wil. And about how much you decided you weren’t going to be like Dream.”

Wilbur stopped, staring, then his head fell into his hands, and suddenly he was curled around his knees much like Tommy, leaning on the boxes so they were across from each other. “Dream... locked you up then.”

“Yeah,” Tommy said listlessly. “When you found me, I hadn’t left my room for weeks, and I’d been stuck in that house for months. Touching grass again was pretty much the only thing on my bucket list. So. That was Dream’s version of keeping me safe, and it almost killed me. What’s yours?”

For a moment, Wilbur avoided looking at him, head still buried in his hands, fingers tangling in his hair. But then he finally looked up, and Tommy would guess that his eyes were distressed.

“I want to keep you safe,” Wilbur admitted, voice breathless and shaky. “Fuck, I can’t- I can’t say I didn’t consider it. Just keeping you here but I know that’s not- That wouldn’t help. And I said I wouldn’t be like Dream, I wouldn’t hurt you. I don’t want to hurt you. But I don’t know how to keep you safe. I thought- I thought I could trust Phil and Techno to help but they don’t- they don’t care about you like I do.” The next part read like a silent confession. “I don’t know how to keep you safe, Tommy. I just want to keep you.”

*I don't want to lose you.*

“Well,” Tommy said finally, after a minute had gone by. “You’re not keeping me in a room. I wouldn’t survive it.”

“I know.”

“You could be like Dream, if you really wanted. I just wouldn’t be around long enough to indulge you.”

Another shaky inhale. “I know.”

Tommy paused, then tilted his head back against his bed, so he could stare up at the rafters of the ceiling, at the cobwebs and knots in the wood. Huh, that collection of whorls sort of looked like Wilbur’s face. Neat. “Neither of them hurt me, I wasn’t lying about that. Techno... Techno’s just covered in blood in general, and he keeps getting blood on me some-fucking-how. He uh, kinda cares about me too, I think, so you don’t need to worry about him. You were right that they’ve both said some shit that frankly pissed me off, though. But Techno’s fine, and Phil’s teaching me to sew, so I don’t know. None of it is anything that’s going to hurt me. You’re doing fine, Wilbur. I’m fine.”

“I know.”

There was nothing for awhile. Tommy closed his eyes and just breathed, feeling the dull ache in his leg and the way flowers rattled in his lungs. It wasn’t even the afternoon yet, and he was already tired.

Finally, there was sound, the rustle of fabric and creak of floorboards, and Tommy cracked an eye open to watch Wilbur scoot across the gap between them until he was beside Tommy.

“Can I... hug you?” Wilbur asked.

Tommy blinked. “What.”

“Hug, like, like I put my arms around you, um, and kind of... squeeze?” Wilbur offered.

“I know what a hug is you bitch.”

They both stared at each other.

Then Wilbur slowly reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a crisp fifty dollar Monopoly bill. Motherfucker.

“Fuck you,” Tommy said as he took it and added it to his stash.

“I’ll be careful,” Wilbur promised. “I know your bones are brittle and about as strong as a butterfly’s wing but-“

“Shut the fuck up, my body can take it,” Tommy snapped. “You have five seconds to get this over with.”

Then Tommy was stiffening as Wilbur leaned closer, the smell of stale water obnoxious at this proximity, and arms were around him, but it wasn’t like Dream. Dream rarely hugged him, and it was always those stupid half assed shoulder squeezes. Wilbur hugged him like he was drowning and Tommy was a convenient life preserver.

Tommy's face ended up mashed into Wilbur's shoulder, nose shoved into the rough material of the trench coat that smelled like smoke and algae. He could feel arms around him, pressing tight, like they had two nights ago. Not enough to bruise or ache, but enough that if Tommy closed his eyes, he could almost feel like he was okay. It almost felt like this was safety.

"You don't even have the strength to break my bones," he mumbled into Wilbur's shoulder. "Pathetic."

"Shut up, I'm going easy on you."

"Of course, that's what they all say and- Are you... Are you crying?" Because Wilbur had made a noise that sounded suspiciously like a sniffle.

"No." Oh god his voice was wobbling.

"Fuck, you are! Why the fuck are you crying?" Tommy asked, panicked.

The arms pressed around him just a bit more, Wilbur burying his face against Tommy. "It's just- You're so very small. And so very full of rage. And that's a lot of emotion tucked into such a tiny body-"

"Oh my god."

"-I don't want you to hurt yourself with all that aggression packed into such a little space-"

"Let the fuck go of me, you've lost hugging privileges'."

"No."

"I hate you."

"I know."

Finally, the hug loosened, and then fell away, and the air was cold as it swirled back around Tommy, phantom touches haunting his skin. He looked at Wilbur, but the monster was aggressively scrubbing his face with his coat sleeve, so Tommy looked away again.

"I won't be like Dream," Wilbur said, then, and Tommy tensed. "I won't be, but- but I also don't know what they were like. I don't- I don't know anything about them, or how they hurt you, and I don't know how to avoid doing the same."

"I'll tell you," Tommy found himself saying. "I'll tell you about him, sometime. Not now, but sometime. Just. In the meantime don't lock me in my fucking room."

"Okay," Wilbur said softly. "It would be too small of a space to hold all that anger anyway."

"Oh fuck you. Also if I tell you to fuck off, you fuck off. No hovering bullshit if I ask, alright?"

"Okay."

Tommy hesitated, then lunged forward and shoved a hand into Wilbur's pocket before he could stop him, closing a fist around crisp paper and pulling back. "For my troubles," Tommy told him, waving the Monopoly money in his face.

"Okay."

"The couch wasn't even fucking real, was it?"

Wilbur blinked. "...The couch?"

"You said there was a couch up here, but that was just a lie to lure me in, wasn't it?"

Wilbur blinked again, slower, then turned to the stacks of boxes. "No, actually, there is a couch under there."

"Oh," Tommy said, and the two of them stared at the looming wall of storage bins. "I'm not helping you move those."

"Fuck."

It turned out there was a couch under all those boxes after all. It was faded green and ratty and mostly full of dust, but it was something. A place for Wilbur to stay. Close enough, packed into the attic, that when they slept Tommy might be able to reach from his bed across the gap and hold Wilbur's hand.

It was a dumb thing to think.

## Chapter End Notes

t-them.

Phil: do you ever want to talk about your feelings, Tommy?

Tommy: no

Wilbur: i do!

Phil: i know wilbur

Wilbur: i think tommy's sad and it's all your fault

Phil: i know wilbur

Fanart:

-[a lot of what ifs](#)

-[wilbitch](#) (tw trypophobia)

-[techno the beloved](#)

# breathless, but like, the opposite of that

## Chapter Summary

There's someone laughing in the garden.

## Chapter Notes

Hey. Been awhile. Don't worry, ass still juicy, fic still continuing, everyone still desires me carnally, etc. Anyway,

### Warnings

Coughing, suicidal thoughts/tendencies, referenced past child abuse, tryphobia, flashbacks

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In another life, Tommy might've been a flower.

Actually, no, wait, fuck that idea. In another life, Tommy might've been, uh, something else that sat in the dirt and faced the sun all day, but wasn't the worst thing to ever exist. Which is what he was doing.

The grass was soft against him, the wind rustling the leaves in the background, and he closed his eyes briefly to feel the warmth of the sun against his face.

Then he resumed carefully putting rocks in the little holes in Wilbur's arm, the monster's breathing slow and even from where he was dozing beside Tommy.

Unfortunately, the repetitive motions gave Tommy a chance to think, his least favourite pastime. Yesterday had been... something. Mostly spent inside after their talk in the attic. Part of it was watching Wilbur move all the boxes off a ratty, forgotten couch, then beat the dust from the furniture and scrounge up another pillow and blanket. The rest was reading and playing boardgames on the floor. Nothing particularly interesting, but it was still just... something.

Wilbur slept on the attic couch that night, and his breathing had been far away, but simultaneously so close. Whenever Tommy woke up coughing, he could see Wilbur awake

and sitting up as well, staying with him until he went back to sleep.

Fucking bastard.

Now Tommy was determined to be outside to make up for it, and the air was warm as he breathed it in and out methodically. There were a lot of noises around him, from the rustling of the forest, to the hum of insects, to the tick tick of the garden sprinkler, to the soft whistles of the bitch himself. Tommy didn't pay much attention to any of it, instead content to rest his chin in his hand and pull up small pebbles from the earth, sneaking them into little holes like Wilbur was plastic playground equipment.

So far, he'd managed to block one hole that ended up changing the tune of Wilbur's whistling snores, and now Tommy was considering if he could play him like a shitty clarinette.

Behind him, the door to the cottage opened briefly, and Tommy glanced back to see Techno trudge out, turning sharply to head for the side of the house. He turned a tap, and Tommy watched as the sprinkler in the vegetable garden ticked to a halt, leftover water dripping down into the wet earth.

"What?" Techno asked when he caught Tommy staring his way.

"What?" Tommy echoed, hunching his shoulders.

"Why are you looking at me?"

"Why are you looking at me?"

"Do you... need something?" Techno said tentatively.

"Do you need something?" Tommy shot back.

They both stared at each other again.

"Did you... want to help garden?" Techno said then, and Tommy blinked.

"Sure."

He stood up, wincing at the ache from sitting too long, and brushed the grass off himself before realising he didn't care. His crutches were slotted neatly under his arms, and he made his way over to Techno, who was crouched beside a patch of plants, sticking his claw into the soil.

"Probably should've waited to water after, but it should be fine," the monster mumbled as Tommy got close, before speaking louder. "We're planting a new batch of potatoes today."

Tommy had no idea what he was supposed to do with that information. "Okay."

"There's a bag of sprouting ones over by the porch. Take this and start cutting the big ones into smaller pieces, just make sure there's a sprout on each piece," Techno instructed, and held out his cleaver.

Tommy stared at the cleaver, the literal size of his actual child human arm, rusted by blood with a deeply stained handle, then back up at Techno. "This feels entirely impractical."

"What's impractical?"

"Nevermind," Tommy muttered, and gingerly grabbed the handle, wincing as the solid block of blade immediately lodged into the ground with a satisfying thunk as Techno let go, Tommy's arms doing fuckall against the sheer weight. Holy shit this cleaver was stupidly murderous, the handle leaving red residue on Tommy's palms. It was also stupidly big, his hand looking tiny on the handle that fit Techno's grip perfectly. "I got this," Tommy grouched, awkwardly letting one crutch slip away to free up a hand to drag the cleaver, while he took a step back, dragged it forward, then stepped back again.

Slowly, he managed to haul it over to the porch, then dropped down into the grass. Tommy stared at it. God, the cleaver was like, the size of his whole arm span. Holy shit how was this practical?

He glanced over at Techno, who was poking morosely at a tomato, then focused back on his work, reaching into the rough sack by the porch and pulling out a potato. He flipped the cleaver so the blade was pointing up in the grass, braced it with his feet to keep it still, then used both hands to saw a potato along its length until the potato split in half.

A kitchen knife would be so much more practical.

He then sawed a half into quarters, wincing as his arm nearly brushed the blade when the potato broke suddenly apart. After that he was more careful, focusing on cutting the potato into what seemed like reasonable chunks with little sprouts on each one, then moving on to the next potato in the bag.

"You can use the chopping block, you know," Techno said, when he paused in examining his plants. He gestured over to the bloodied tree stump near the basement doors, and Tommy now had to live with the mental image of Techno slamming a massive cleaver into a tiny ass potato like it had committed war crimes.

"I can't lift the cleaver," Tommy told him listlessly.

"Ah," Techno said. "Carry on then."

Tommy went back to his potato sawing, but got bored a dozen potatoes in. He glanced over at Wilbur, passed out in the grass, made a decision, aimed, and hucked a potato chunk at him. It missed and thunked into the grass near the monster's head.

Tommy grabbed another chunk and tried again, this time managing to nail Wilbur in the face.

"Gaw!" Wilbur gargled, throwing himself up and looking wildly around with a disgruntled expression. "What the fuck!? What-? Tommy?"

His eyes focused over on Tommy, and Tommy waved before going back to sawing another potato in half.



“Is that Techno’s fucking cleaver?!” Wilbur shrieked, getting to his feet, only for about a hundred small rocks to suddenly fall out of the holes in his body, clattering across the ground in cascade.

Wilbur stared at rocks. Techno and Tommy stared at Wilbur.

“What the fuck,” Wilbur whispered in dawning horror. He moved his head just slightly, and another handful of pebbles fell out of his face.

“Wilbur, why are you filled with rocks?” Techno asked calmly.

“I have no idea. Why does Tommy have your cleaver?”

Techno shrugged. “He’s cutting potatoes for me.”

“Is that safe?” Wilbur pressed.

“Yes.”

“No,” Tommy countered. “Do you want to come help, Wil?”

A bunch of conflicting emotions seemed to cross Wilbur’s face at that moment, before he shook himself, dislodging several more rocks, and marched over to Tommy. “Yeah, I- Yeah, I’ll help. Do you, uh, happen to know why the fuck I’m filled with rocks?”

“No,” Tommy said, and cut another potato.

“This doesn’t seem practical,” Wilbur admitted as he sat on the other side of the cleaver. He hesitated, picking up a potato and gingerly sawing it back and forth along the blade until it broke apart. He moved his legs, joining Tommy in bracing the cleaver with his feet to leave his hands free for potato splitting.

“Well, if you have a better idea I’d love to see it,” Tommy muttered.

“I don’t,” Wilbur admitted, and they cut potatoes in silence.

“You two look incredibly idiotic right now,” Techno announced, very much not helping. “Just two nerds with sad, noodle arms.”

“Yeah, well, not all of us are built for massacres,” Wilbur shot back. “Some of us like to go about things more delicately.”

“Sure,” Techno agreed serenely. “Still doesn’t stop this from being sad.”

Wilbur’s eyes narrowed, and he made a weird as fuck clicking sound, before snatching up a potato and throwing it at Techno. The monster batted it aside easily, letting out an amused huffing sound, before turning and going back to inspecting the garden.

“I could lift it,” Wilbur then said to Tommy. “The cleaver. I could lift it if I wanted to, but I won’t, because it’s awkwardly balanced and smells bad. But I could lift it.”

“Alright,” Tommy said, and he wouldn’t say he was amused. Just. Entertained, or not-bored. He watched as Wilbur lifted up a potato and then dropped it down to see it guillotined on the cleaver. Hesitantly, Tommy dropped a potato down as well, watching it wedge onto the blade.

“Potato,” Wilbur said, and Tommy nodded along sagely.

With two people working it went by quicker, and finally they reached the end of the bag. Tommy carefully scooped up his pile of chunks and put them back in, standing shakily to his feet and letting the cleaver fall over into the grass. Wilbur followed his lead, hooking a claw around the bag to peer inside curiously.

“What do you want us to do with these?” Wilbur called, loudly, over the garden, and Tommy watched as Techno’s head perked up.

The beast brushed the dirt from his clothes before standing fully, towering over the plants as he carefully manoeuvred to a churned patch of dirt. “Bring them here and we’ll start planting.”

Tommy ended up passing the bag over to Wilbur so he could go get his other crutch and follow, stepping on a dandelion on his way by. The soil in the spot Techno chose was a bit wet and muddy from the sprinkler, apparently overly so, as Techno was grumbling under his breath about it. When Wilbur passed the bag over, Techno opened it briefly to inspect the potatoes before giving a sharp, approving nod.

“Right, so all we need to do is dig a little hole like this, then put the potato in and cover it again,” Techno said as he demonstrated, pulling a chunk out of the bag and placing it gently in the ground, the broad claws of his hands easily scooping dirt to put overtop.

“Okay.” Tommy plopped himself onto the dirt, wincing at the wet feel. He reached forward, pulled at the mud with his hands to form a hole, and shoved a potato in, covering it with a few fistfuls of soil.

“Good,” Techno said. “We’re going to space them out like this.”

But Tommy was still hung up on the ‘good’ part. He blinked, looking over at Techno, but the monster was focused on marking out the spacing for the potatoes.

All... All Tommy had done was put a shitty potato piece in the ground. There was nothing good about it. No skill, no thoughts. Just a potato in the ground.

Cautiously, Tommy planted another in the place indicated, and when Techno caught his eye, the monster gave an approving nod. “That’s perfect.”

Well, fuck him, apparently Techno thought this task was more challenging than it was. A potato in the ground definitely didn’t warrant compliments, but if Techno was going to waste his breath on something pointless then it wasn’t like Tommy was going to stop him.

Still, for further research he planted a few more potatoes, just to see what would happen. Sure enough, Techno kept nodding or said he was doing good, which, weird. Tommy didn’t know

what to do with that.

At some point Wilbur finally joined him, making a face as he crouched in the mud near Tommy. A few more rocks fell out as Wilbur leaned over to pluck up a potato and put it in the ground.

“That’s too shallow of a hole, Wilbur,” Techno said without looking over. “You need to plant it deeper.”

“Wha- It’s fine!”

“It’s not. Plant it deeper.”

With a huff, Wilbur shoved the potato piece in deeper, than grabbed another and stuck it into the soil with the same annoyance.

“You planted that one too close to the one beside it,” Techno chimed in.

“I did not!”

“You did.”

“I’m doing the same thing Tommy is!”

“Yes but he’s doing it well.”

Tommy blinked again at the words, turning back to the ground and planting another potato. The sun was warm today, it felt like his cheeks were heating. He reached for another, and caught Wilbur’s eye.

Wilbur was staring at him critically, making a face, hunched over like a gargoyle so he wouldn’t touch the mud. Tommy hadn’t bothered staying clean, his pants and hands caked in dirt.

“Do you need something?” Tommy asked, when Wilbur wouldn’t stop staring.

“I don’t understand. We’re literally doing the same thing,” Wilbur admitted, pouting.

Tommy paused then, considering. The soil was soft between his fingers, and gritty when he curled his palm. He was next to Wilbur, the monster almost leaning over him, and it wasn’t... It wasn’t anything like Dream’s hovering. Tommy could shrug Wilbur off and Wilbur wouldn’t do anything more than be annoying.

It was tempting, then, so tempting to just...

Tommy bit his lip, then made a decision. “Come closer, I’ll show you the secret.”

“Secret?” Wilbur echoed, leaning over more to criticise the ground, eyes fixated on the potato and not on Tommy’s hand that curled around a fistful of mud. “Why the fuck is there a secret to potato- MMF!”

Wilbur's arms went pinwheeling as Tommy raked a wet, cold handful of mud down Wilbur's face, the monster losing its balance from its precarious crouch and landing ass-first in the dirt.

Wilbur sputtered, eyes wide, mouth agape, mud sloughing off his face. He looked so befuddled, so disgusted, and so just- Wilbur.

Tommy couldn't help it. He choked on a snort, hand coming up to his mouth to muffle the sound, but not enough.

Wilbur's eyes flashed to him, but there wasn't anger or rage brewing there, just complete bafflement. "Tommy!" Wilbur hissed, sounding so scandalized that Tommy felt his mouth twitch, something so stupid about the sight.

Then he just.

Laughed.

Wilbur's face scrunched up before he was pushing forward, smearing a hand across Tommy's face and getting mud in his nose. Tommy gagged, grinned, pushed back, lobbing a glob of mud at Wilbur.

Then, he turned and lobbed one at Techno, to cover all his bases. Tommy didn't discriminate.

It splattered against Techno's skull with a solid *thump!* Remains sloughed off, as the empty sockets turned to Tommy. For a moment, the beast did nothing, and Tommy felt himself tense slightly, suddenly unsure.

That was before another mudball slammed into Techno at terminal velocity, physically snapping his head back, thrown by Wilbur. Wilbur cackled as the impact exploded in a shower of dirt, smile quite literally splitting his face.

Techno's head twisted back up, eye sockets unreadable. Very carefully he reached up and wiped away a wet line of dirt. "I'm being bullied," he decided finally.

Then he dropped down without warning, heaved up a massive line of mud with significantly thicker claws, and lobbed it into Wilbur's face in short order. Wilbur's body jerked back like he got hit with a sack of bricks, knocking him down into a puddle and causing water to slosh over his clothes.

He blinked, like a drowned fish, and Tommy cupped his hands around his mouth to stifle the way his breath went funny in his lungs.

Then he caught movement in his peripheral, and turned in time to see Techno finish shaping a careful mudball and toss it underhanded. It smacked against Tommy's shoulder with a bit of a sting and a wet splurt, but nowhere near the velocity Techno had used a moment earlier to kill a man.

Techno threw a second one with the same gentleness, and this time Tommy batted it out of the air before lobbing a glob of his own, except in the next moment there was a blur of

movement before it hit and-

-Wilbur ploughed into Techno full speed.

He took them both down in an aggressive football tackle, right into the muddiest part of the potato patch with an ear-rattling hiss. It caught Tommy so off guard that he just sat there for a moment, stunned, mud forgotten and dripping out of his hand.

Wilbur writhed as Techno managed to pin him to the ground, Wilbur's foot wedged in Techno's gut and muddy hand mashing against his face. Cries of "Fuck you fuck off fuck you potato loving fuck-!" was accompanied by Techno's deadpanned chants of "-Food for the potatoes, food for the potatoes-" as he tried to bury Wilbur in the ground.

Tommy's breathing went weird again, something almost choking him as he brought up a hand to cover the wheezing, quiet noises that made his face scrunch up and mouth hurt from an unfamiliar smile, but Wilbur had just grabbed a potato and ricocheted it off Techno's face and just-!

Tommy laughed. And kept laughing. Raspy and muffled and strained. And for a moment that was all there was.

Then predictably his chest seized with coughing as his breathing went off rhythm, and Tommy ended up gagging on his own inhale, hunching up.

Fuck, this was all so stupid, it wasn't even funny. This was probably the stupidest thing Tommy could laugh about, wasting his breath, gasping on air, but-

-But Techno was snickering as Wilbur floundered in the mud, and Wilbur's voice was pitched up in a cackling shriek as rocks flew out of his holes, and-

Huh.

Tommy had gained control of his lungs again, rough and sore, absently wiping the back of his hand over his mouth. That's when he caught it. Just. Mud smeared skin. Nothing else.

He stopped fully, staring at his own hand like it was the first time he was seeing it, because there really was just... mud. No blood. No purple petals.

Rapidly, Tommy wiped off his hand on the cleanest part of his shirt, then pressed two fingers to his lips and drew them away. Unbloodied. He rolled his tongue around his mouth but couldn't feel any lingering petals, and there weren't any in the dirt around him.

He didn't know what that meant.

Eventually Wilbur and Techno sorted themselves out, wandering back over with grumbles and shoves as they were both entirely coated in mud, but by then Tommy had gone resolutely back to planting potatoes, and fixing the ones that had gotten dug up in the fight.

He kept an eye on both of them though, watching as Wilbur flung more mud at Techno when he critiqued his potato planting again. They finished off a row by the time Tommy had his

next coughing fit. There were blood and petals on his hand again, dripping from his lips, when he drew it away.

But for just a moment, just one instant, he'd coughed and there hadn't been.

Tommy didn't know what it all meant, so instead he just closed his eyes and focused on breathing. The flowers felt full inside his lungs.

From the window, the figure of the not-man watched on.

-

Tommy stared skeptically at the offered hand, then looked up at Wilbur, eyebrows raised.

Wilbur scowled, and made another grabbing motion, braced awkwardly above Tommy in the frame of the attic trapdoor as he reached down.

Tommy continued to stare.

Wilbur continued to make another grabbing motion.

"I don't know what you want-" Tommy began, but Wilbur was quick to cut him off.

"I'm helping!" he huffed, and Tommy stared at the frankly absurdly long arm that was offered at him.

"With what?" Tommy ventured.

"Crutches," Wilbur clarified. "You complained I didn't help last time, so now I'm helping you haul them up."

"Why the fuck didn't you say that to start with?"

"Shut up."

Tommy hesitated, feeling the steady brace of his crutches beneath his arms, and the dull pulsing of his leg. It was dark downstairs, with only lanterns, and Phil and Techno had disappeared at some point after the sun had gone down. Tommy's hair was still wet from yet another bath, wearing a new set of clothes that weren't covered in mud. Wilbur had cleaned up as well, but Tommy could still see bits of mud in the holes of his hand.

Then, because Tommy couldn't stall any longer, he shifted his weight off his crutches, and offered them up to Wilbur. He watched, silent, as the monster grabbed them and hauled them into the attic, and something in Tommy twisted, but he didn't pay attention to it.

The actual climb up the ladder was as painful as always, and Tommy's arms were shaking slightly as he pulled himself up the rest of the way. Wilbur had sat back to give him room, and there, resting beside the bed, were his crutches.

Just... sitting there. In view. In range. Tucked neatly to the side.

Tommy hated that a part of him thought they wouldn't be.

He forced his eyes away, as if it didn't mean anything, and watched as Wilbur stood up with a languid stretch, hands brushing the ceiling even as he stood beneath where it peaked. A rock fell out of the joint near his elbow and bounced across the floorboards. Wilbur frowned at it, then grinned at Tommy, in a delighted way, and if Tommy were to guess he wouldn't be getting sleep anytime soon.

"What?" he asked, resigned.

Wilbur's smile widened. "I have something to show you."

"Is it a dead body?"

Wilbur paused. "Well, no, I- Uh, did you want to see a dead body?"

Tommy stared at him.

Wilbur stared back.

"Why the fuck would I want to see a dead body?" Tommy pressed.

"I don't know!" Wilbur complained, throwing his hands up and turning around. Tommy watched him march across the attic, yanking the rusted frame of a window open. "You were the one who brought it up, just thought I'd check."

"The answer is no."

"Yeah, I got that. Get over here so I can help you out the window."

Why they were going out the window, Tommy didn't bother asking. He just heaved himself to his feet and carefully used the bedframe and boxes to support himself as he limped over to Wilbur. The attic interior was illuminated by a lantern near the bed, causing outside the window to be pitch black.

Wilbur easily hoisted himself onto the window sill, long legs tucked up and body curling like a fucked up spiral. He reached out a hand, without preamble, to Tommy.

And, as happened every time before, Tommy hesitated to reach back.

There- There wasn't really a reason to hesitate. It was Wilbur. Just Wilbur. Tommy reminded himself over and over until his hand slipped into Wilbur's, and he shivered at the sensation of honeycomb holes stark beneath his touch. Long fingers curled around his palm, securing, nails grating by his skin, but never cutting.

Carefully, Wilbur drew back onto the short ledge of the roof beyond the window, guiding Tommy to climb up onto the sill.

For a moment, a soft breeze ruffled through Tommy's hair as he blinked in the utter darkness of the night, seeing nothing beyond the vague outline of trees against the horizon, and where the warm glow of the room illuminated the steep slope of the roof extending just a bit beyond the window, before sharply cutting off.

Unpleasantly, he found his fingers curling sharply into the peeling wood of the sill, and for a moment it was difficult to breathe, watching the way his shadow dipped over the edge.

"You're doing good," was what Wilbur said, and his voice was jarring and clear, coming from somewhere in the night, and his hand was sharp and cold against Tommy's. It pulled him forward, and Tommy resisted. "Just crawl out on your hands and knees. I'll keep you from falling."

There were a thousand ways Tommy could have responded—should have—to keep up the facade. Bitter remarks about how he didn't trust Wilbur. Criticism of Wilbur's choices. Denials that he needed reassurance. Something aggressive, just because.

In the end though, Tommy couldn't say anything. His tongue was thick inside his mouth, his lips unmoving where they were parted so he could breathe a bit heavier, a bit more ragged. He could only stare at the end of the roof, and realise how familiar this all felt.

To be perched on a window sill with so little between himself and the ground.

His leg throbbed sharply, and his body ached, and he could remember with perfect clarity the impact that had knocked the breath from his lungs and left him stunned in the wet grass, the smell of rain all around him. Staring up at the clouded sky after stupidly falling... falling... falling...

There was a gentle pull on his arm, and words in his ears that he couldn't comprehend. But he could hear the voice that spoke in his mind: *Trust me, I won't let you fall.*

So Tommy did. And when Wilbur tugged again, Tommy let himself be guided.

His hand ended up fisted in Wilbur's sleeve, Wilbur gripping him back as he hauled Tommy up. His feet scraped against the dry tiles of the roof, and then his knees hit the rough surface as the safety of the attic was left far behind. Wilbur moved to loop an arm loosely around his shoulders, keeping him in place, the monster positioned between him and the ground. Only then did it get a bit easier to breathe.

At least until the coughing fit hit, and Tommy curled over himself, rigid as he gagged, heart hammering even as he could feel Wilbur bracing him. God, fuck his lungs, of all the places to have a fit it had to be here.

But then it was over, temporary and fleeting. Over enough that Tommy could breathe, and spit out petals, and Wilbur was gently nudging him up the steep incline of the roof again. Bit by



bit, in a crawl, and it took Tommy a moment to realise what the goal was. There, farther up, was a horizontal patch of roof over a window that Wilbur was guiding him to.

The instant they reached it, and the tiles evened out beneath him, Tommy could finally breathe deeper. His fingers uncurled just slightly, from where they'd had a death grip on Wilbur, although his body remained tense. It was then he realised Wilbur had been talking to him this whole time, mindless reassurances that evaporated in the air between them.

He sat on the flat outcropping, felt marginally more safe, and hacked into his arm as his lungs went off rhythm. Wilbur settled beside him, close enough their arms were brushing, extending out his long ass legs until they threatened to hang over the edge. Irrationally, Tommy almost wanted to pull Wilbur back, but he didn't.

"Ugh, I left the light on," Wilbur then muttered, apropos of nothing, and Tommy felt his heart skip a beat at the thought of Wilbur leaving him here to go turn it off. But, instead of doing things normally, Wilbur just snapped his fingers, accompanied by the distinct sound of a several bulbs shattering somewhere, and suddenly all light was snuffed out, drenching them both in the dark.

Tommy blinked, and tried not to let his breathing spike as the roof edge vanished from his vision.

"...Did you break my fucking lamp?"

"I'll get you a new one."

"Bitch," Tommy said, and it was weak.

"Child," Wilbur retorted, and suddenly he was laying back. A moment later, his hand was on Tommy's shoulder, guiding him to do the same.

Stupidly, Tommy let himself be led, and leaned back so he was resting on the slope of the roof, and by nature, looked up.

Oh.

That was when he saw it.

Above them, the sky. Spread out across unending. Framed by the trees that swayed in a gentle roar. Inundated with pinpricks of white in the void. A perfect night sky, and, for the first time in a long time, Tommy saw stars.

He blinked, and stared, at the small scattering of specks, and realised somewhere faintly that he hadn't seen the stars in... maybe ever? Never this far in the middle of nowhere, with darkness all around, accompanied by nothing but crickets and wind.

It was even more captivating that, as he stared and his eyes adjusted, he kept seeing more. At first just bright stars evenly spread in perfect darkness, but then smaller and smaller specks and then... Well, at some point the sky became textured, and that was the weirdest thing of

all. To see the slight warping, the slight paling of darkness, as it folded into the unfathomable depths of a galaxy.

“Oh,” Tommy said eventually, when he’d processed. His breath came out cold.

“Do you like it?” Wilbur asked eagerly. Tommy could hear the scratch of long nails against the roof tiles as Wilbur sat up to look down at him. “Phil’s last human liked the stars a lot, so I thought you might like them too.”

“Oh,” Tommy repeated. “Yeah. I don’t... don’t see them much, in cities.”

Wilbur hummed happily, leaning over to bump his shoulder lightly against Tommy’s. “What other things do you like?”

Tommy blinked, feeling almost dizzy, unable to look away from the stars that engulfed his vision. A week ago, he never thought he’d go outside again, and now... Now he was breathing.

Suddenly, he felt like he needed to answer Wilbur. He needed to say something, anything, as a way to thank him for just this moment. And for... for earlier that day, the memory of laughing so foreign in Tommy’s head.

His lips moved, but all he could say was just... “I liked the colour red.”

“Liked?” Wilbur asked. “Past tense?”

Tommy shrugged, unable to explain the way that liking red was just... a memory. Something that existed before his life had numbers attached. Before his leg shattered into a thousand pieces. Before he ended up on the ground, staring up at the sky, unable to even breathe from the pain of falling.

He tried to scour his memory for something else to give Wilbur. Ignoring the fact there was nothing left to give. “I uh, like being outside? It’s... It helps me feel like I can breathe easier. Sometimes.”

Wilbur hummed, and Tommy clamped his mouth shut, suddenly wondering if he’d said too much. If Wilbur wouldn’t twist it back and ruin those things, just because he could, but then again... Wilbur wasn’t Dream.

So it was... safe. To just say things.

Wilbur was safe. Tommy needed to remember that.

For a moment, he dared to look away from the stars. He turned his head to the side, to look at Wilbur instead. The monster was examining the sky with an absent expression, hands folded over his chest.

Tommy thought about earlier, in the garden. Thought about the way he’d just... laughed. Thought about the lack of blood and petals after. Thought about what it could mean.

Something was different than it used to be. Wilbur was different, and he'd... changed something. Tommy lifted two fingers to his lips again, and drew them away. There were a few lingering flecks of blood on the fingertips, from his coughing fit, but once. Just once. He'd coughed and there hadn't been. And Tommy had no idea what that meant.

"Sorry," he eventually mumbled, going back to watching the sky so Wilbur wouldn't see he'd been staring. "I can't think of much else."

"That's alright," Wilbur said. "It's still something." *I'm glad you said anything at all.*

Tommy grimaced, and decided to ignore that voice that chimed in. He felt weird. Chest too heavy but also too light. The flowers were swirling in his lungs, and for a moment he had to abandon the night sky in favour of sitting up and curling over himself to cough petals into his arm. The painful seizes of his chest brought tears to the corners of his eyes, but it wasn't anything new. It was just business as usual, even if it was disappointing.

By the time he was able to lay back his breathing was raspy and shallow, and Tommy pinched his eyes closed while he focused on not starting another fit.

"...Are you okay?" Wilbur asked from beside him, and Tommy felt his face screw up before he'd even registered the words.

"Shut the fuck up."

"Answer the fucking question."

"No, fuck you."

And so it went.

Something the same. Something different.

Like bloodless fingertips.

Tommy breathed deep to keep the world steady, and he could feel the brush of Wilbur's hand against his own. Something different. That's- That's what he needed. A difference, between now and what there was.

"I'm supposed to tell you about Dream," Tommy admitted despite himself, voice hollow for just a moment, raspy and dry from coughing.

"When you want to," Wilbur corrected.

"I don't know what to say about him."

"Alright." *I wish you would say something, though.*

Tommy breathed in, exhaled, and said, "I think he wanted to watch me die."

There were stars in the sky above them.

“Why?” Wilbur asked, and Tommy focused on the edges of the trees in the peripheral of his vision.

“He wanted to- to play caretaker, or something. I don’t know. He knew that I was dying- We both knew that I was dying, and he... He was letting it happen, and he wanted it to happen, and I don’t know why but I knew that he was going to kill me and I couldn’t... It’s... He cared about me, in some fucked up way, but it wasn’t enough and I was dying and he’d act so sad but he was... He wanted it to happen. He wanted to watch me suffocate.”

Tommy paused, and blinked, and hated that he'd said so much and nothing at all. The air was cold and stinging against his eyes. He tried again.

“I opened that window because I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of killing me. I opened that door so it wouldn’t be slow. Do you get it?”

“No,” Wilbur said, and he was turned, facing Tommy, and slowly one his hands reached out and rested against Tommy’s cheek. The fingers were warm, almost burning against the cold of the night. “But I want to.”

Then, Wilbur sat up, and Tommy watched the monster shuck off the old, moulded trench coat that had clung to him all this time. The fabric was rough and weathered when Wilbur draped it over him, and Tommy comprehended that blankly, the warmth of the wool lining blocking out the chill that he hadn’t noticed till now.

“You know,” Wilbur said, resting his head against his knees so he could regard Tommy better, his silhouette dark against the night sky. “Dream sort of sounds like a monster.”

Tommy blinked, then snorted, lying back down with a huff and pulling the coat up to his chin, wrinkling his nose against the smell of it. Cigarette smoke and algae. “Yeah, not shit.”

“No, I meant like- like an actual monster,” Wilbur clarified. “Like one of us. Like he had a hunger to satisfy.”

“A hunger?” Tommy echoed.

“That’s what Phil likes to call it. It’s something within us that needs to be sated, in whatever way suits the monster. I like to watch the way people wither themselves to the bone, walking lost, screaming, stumbling until they drop. It’s... satisfying. To me. I don’t care much for the corpses after, but Techno gets satisfaction in taking them apart, and Phil gets satisfaction in stringing them up. Whatever satiates the hunger.

“But Dream wasn’t-“

“He wasn’t a monster,” Wilbur said with a dismissive flick of hand. “His insides were as human as they came. I just thought it was interesting that he acted like one of us. Like there was something to satisfy.”

“Oh,” Tommy said, and that was the end of it. It would’ve been simpler, if Dream was a monster. It would’ve all pieced itself together and finally made sense, finally gave a purpose

to what Tommy went through. But Dream was just a person. And Dream wanted to watch him die. And there wasn't anything more.

"Are we sleeping out here?" Wilbur asked, and Tommy deliberately rolled to face the other way, tucking Wilbur's coat up higher against his face. Shoving his nose into the smoke and mould and residue.

"Fuck you, I'm not moving."

"Alright," Wilbur huffed, something affectionate. Something that made Tommy curl up tighter. "I'll go get the blankets."

## Chapter End Notes

they lose the blankets again. net zero gain

Tommy: i actually laughed today, like some kind of little kid. do you remember laughing?

Wilbur: yeah...? i laugh every single day of my life

Tommy: my condolences, is it because you're a clown

Welp, I'm sure nothing happened here that we need to think too hard about anymore :/

FANART:

-[afterschool art club](#) (tw trypophobia/body horror)

-[hrrrrng,,, biblically accurate monster designs <3](#) (tw trypophobia/body horror)

-[rat bastard child](#) (tw trypophobia)

Also it has brought to my attention that tiktoks of my fic exist:

-[IT HIM](#)

-[HE'S MY BEST FRIEND](#) (tw trypophobia)

-[teeth](#) (tw trypophobia)

(so far i've been looking at the #iafamaygmaf for tiktoks but let me know if there's others)

# Drive My Deer Into Your Heart

## Chapter Summary

Tommy has no idea what he's doing.

## Chapter Notes

hi hello yes its me, i thought i was going to update on halloween as a surprise, but january is basically halloween right

### Warnings

Graphic depictions of coughing, dehumanizing use of it/its pronouns, implied animal death/horror, minor injury, suicidal thoughts

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“If you could have anything in the world right now, what would it be?”

“Peace and fucking quiet,” Tommy answered immediately.

He could picture Wilbur’s distasteful expression without even turning his head. He kept his eyes closed as his body lay prone, attempting to sunburn his face. The monster shifted pointedly.

“No. Unhelpful contribution, try again.”

“Unhelpful question. Try a different one.”

“Ugh,” Wilbur complained, throwing out an arm and smacking Tommy in the shoulder. He opened one eye to glare, but ended up awkwardly squinting in the sunlight at Wilbur’s general direction. “I’m asking if you want anything. Last time you wanted your crutches. What else do you want?”

A new set of lungs, Tommy thought dryly, and for anything else to be worth contemplating.

But... Days ago, Tommy had asked for his crutches, and Wilbur had *tried*. Tommy still remembered Wilbur's expression, standing over him in the dark garden, distraught and lost

and guilty, because he hadn't been able to find them. But he had tried. For hours. And Tommy hadn't even bothered to say thank you. So if Tommy asked again, then Wilbur might...

But was there anything worth wanting? Worth asking for?

There were his crutches, tucked neatly by his feet, and... Oh right. Tommy had wanted to ask for shoes.

Which he wouldn't. Because the crutches had been a fluke. A weird mind game by Phil, and stupidity by Wilbur. To ask for shoes, to ask for an easier way to fucking escape... Tommy wasn't an idiot.

But Wilbur wasn't Dream.

Did... Would Wilbur care? If Tommy had a better chance of escaping? Fuck, his leg was bad, maybe that was good enough?

Tommy opened his mouth, almost breathed the words, but stopped again, caught in a memory.

Back with Dream, he'd had a ragged pair of sneakers. They were red and full of holes, somehow acquired at a past foster house and yet to be replaced. The bottoms were thin, but there were little doodles on the sides, drawn by him and Tubbo when they were bored. Every day when Tommy got home, he'd kick them off, then place them neatly out of the way by the door so Dream wouldn't yell, and that would be it.

But Tommy remembered it. There was so much else going on that the detail really shouldn't have stuck, but it did. Glancing over to the door and... his shoes were gone from where they'd always been. He'd looked for them, but only briefly. He already knew what that meant.

Dream wasn't going to let Tommy leave the house anymore. The missing shoes were just another nail in the coffin. Another subtle message that Tommy was never getting out of this. Dream would never let him go.

If he... If he asked Wilbur for shoes, and Wilbur got him some... What would happen if Tommy looked for them one day, and didn't find them?

Then he wouldn't bother living anymore, because Tommy was never, ever going to go through that again.

And Wilbur was not Dream.

"Shoes," Tommy said, the word slipping from his mouth without his consent. He covered it up by talking more. "My feet are full of splinters."

The way Wilbur beamed at him was horrible, actually. Fuck, Wilbur looked like Tommy had hung the fucking moon in the sky. It was just one request. But then again, the other night he'd mentioned liking the colour red, and Wilbur's face had gotten all sappy, so maybe he was just weird like that.

“I’ll ask Phil to- No, wait, I think there’s probably some in the attic,” Wilbur said quickly, already climbing to his feet. “Come one, let’s go look.”

Tommy stared at him. “Now?”

Wilbur stared back. “...Yeah?”

“Fine,” Tommy grouched, and pushed himself up, stretching as his bones cracked and he yawned. His face and hair were warm from the sun, but the promise of shoes... Fuck, it was the weirdest things that got him motivated, wasn’t it?

Wilbur stood there like a convenient lamppost to lean on, as Tommy gathered up his crutches and slotted them into place. The house was empty when they got inside, quiet with pale shadows. The attic was even quieter, full of creaking wood as they both got up the ladder, Wilbur hauling up Tommy’s crutches when he handed them over.

Without preamble, Wilbur went over to one of the old trunks, a dark blue one, and popped the latches open. Instantly Tommy was overwhelmed with the musty chemical smell of mothballs, and he pulled his shirt over his nose as he coughed harshly, but at least it wasn’t as bad as the basement.

By the time he got his breath back and sat down beside the trunk to pick through it, Wilbur had gotten up to open a window and returned. Inside, well, Tommy wasn’t too terribly surprised. They looked like the clothes someone’s grandparents would wear, which made sense, because those were always the clothes that had been left out for him to wear: sweater vests, collared shirts, and faded trousers that he had to roll up past his ankles.

“Why do you have so many clothes?” he asked idly, watching Wilbur crack open another trunk, deep red this time, after this one apparently didn’t have what he was looking for. “I’ve never seen any of you wear any of these.”

“Well, they’re not exactly our clothes,” Wilbur said, leaning face-first into the trunk.

Tommy blinked. Stared down at the shirt in his hands. Thought about the bodies in the basement. “...Oh.”

“What?” Wilbur asked, lifting his head to glance at Tommy’s expression. “Wait, no, not like that! How would we even get all the blood out? In what world would that be worth it?”

Tommy made an incredulous gesture. “Then why the fuck do you have so many clothes?”

Wilbur threw his hands up. “How should I know? It’s Techno’s lair, ask him.”

“But you also live here.”

“No, I freeload here. There’s a difference. It means I don’t care- Aha!” Wilbur pulled back, a pair of worn shoes in his hands. “Here’s some!”

He handed them over, and Tommy looked at them. It was a pair of faded dress shoes, the surfaces scuffed up. They were too big and loose when he put them on, not to mention stiff



and would give blisters easily. They weren't his red sneakers, covered in sharpie doodles. They were just shoes.

"Thanks," he said, and found he meant it.

"Feel free to take clothes from here when you need them," Wilbur added, still rooting through the trunk. Tommy would not do that, but he nodded along anyway.

Finally, Wilbur pulled back, a briefly bewildered expression on his face before he grinned sharply at Tommy, and held up his prize: a deck of cards.

Tommy blinked. "Why was that with the clothes?"

"Why is anything anywhere in this attic?" Wilbur retorted. "Do you know what this means?"

Tommy hesitated, then felt a smile tug at his mouth. "Poker?"

Wilbur's eyes were gleaming. "Poker."

And neither of them knew how to play.

-

Tommy considered Techno, from where he was laying perpendicular to him in the grass. The beast was moving amongst his garden, carefully examining leaves and prodding at vegetables with thick, dirt-stained claws.

The sun was warm today, like it was yesterday, and Tommy could doze again if he hadn't spent the previous afternoon partially napping on the couch between bouts of poker games.

He was still getting used to it. The sounds of Wilbur sleeping near him at night, dangling over the edges of the ratty couch. The tremble of the needle between his fingers when he spent the morning sewing next to Phil. The feeling of stiff shoes on his feet, protecting him from the sharp rocks in the garden.

He was getting used to how he just... asked. And Wilbur got him shoes. He asked, and Phil got his crutches. Dream used to do that too, sorta, if Tommy caught him at the right time. But that was at the start, and by the end... By the end everything had fallen apart anyway, and Tommy knew better than to open his fucking mouth when Dream's eyes were on him.

But here, Tommy asked, and nothing bad happened. It didn't mean bad things couldn't happen, but Tommy hadn't stumbled upon those consequences yet. So... maybe he could test it, just a little, to see if it was true or not.

"Hey," Tommy said idly, causing Techno to glance his way and Wilbur to look up from his book. "Do you think I could, um, help you water the plants?"

Wilbur was still watching while Techno turned to consider him fully. “Sure. You can help set up the sprinkler. The soil around the tomatoes is looking a little dry.”

So Tommy did just that.

Stood up, got his crutches, and pushed his way forward, the feeling of grass and dirt blocked by the soles of his shoes. Techno directed him on where to drag the sprinkler, then to the tap to turn it on. The water started up, arching over the garden and splattering on the leaves.

Tommy glanced over at Techno again, the monster looming beside him, and then back out at the garden. “So... why do you have so many clothes in the attic?”

Techno shifted, the skull tilting his way to look down at him, before the monster gave a slow shrug. “Aesthetic, I’d imagine.”

“You’d imagine?” Tommy echoed. “You don’t know? Isn’t it your house?”

“It is,” Techno agreed. “But they say half the lair makes itself.”

Tommy had... He had no fucking idea what that meant. “Oh.”

“You could also ask Phil, he could’ve put them there. He keeps hoarding things in my house.”

From across the garden, Wilbur gave an exaggerated snort. “Like you don’t already hoard things?”

“At least I’m not as bad as Phil,” Techno countered defensively. “And I told you the livers were non-negotiable.”

“I’m just saying,” Wilbur drawled. “They taste better than they look.”

“Like a potato,” Tommy muttered quietly to himself. Fuck, he’d eaten a lot of potatoes in this house, his throat having recovered enough to start eating rougher foods. Which meant chunks of softened potatoes and other vegetables in thick stews.

Techno was staring down at him. “Yes,” the monster said carefully. “Like a potato.”

And for some reason that made Tommy crack a smile.

-

“So, why are there so many clothes in the attic?” Tommy asked the next morning without preamble, nestled on the couch with a few felt squares set out before him.

Phil looked up from its own project, hat tilting curiously as its needle hovered over some flesh it was sewing together. “Pardon?”

“Techno said they were yours,” Tommy clarified, and watched as Phil let out a long sigh and slouched back in its chair.

“Tell Techno he needs to stop blaming me for his half of the hoarding,” it said dryly. “The clothes aren’t mine.”

Tommy felt himself lose another brain cell. “Then why are they there?”

“Why is anything in this lair?” Phil countered, and by this point the phrase was getting repetitive.

Tommy decided not to pursue the point further.

-

It was the simplest things that were the hardest to ask.

“Can we...?” But it tasted wrong on Tommy’s tongue, going against every instinct that he’d carefully crafted. Asking was always risky, but more than anything, Dream hated it when he asked for food.

Some of the other places he’d been fostered in were also weird about food, but Dream more than the rest. The pantry and fridge were always locked down, and Tommy rarely risked being caught in the kitchen at all when he could help it. Dream bringing him food those last few weeks had barely impacted anything, a side note in an already long list of the way things had gotten so profoundly fucked up.

But. When he asked for things from the monsters, there weren’t consequences. There wasn’t much of anything. They tried to get him what he asked for, and so far succeeded, and that was the end of it. So. Tommy could ask this then, even if his stomach was curling uncomfortably with a fear that felt very distant in his mind.

“Can we, um, have something else besides soup?”

His words felt too loud in the room, the monsters too quiet, but Wilbur didn’t seem to notice and Techno was polishing his cleaver and all Phil did was tilt its head for a moment. “Oh. I suppose... Did you have something in mind?”

And Tommy didn’t, but he went with the simplest thing he could think of. “Pizza?”

Phil considered for a moment, head tilting far enough to set Tommy’s nerves on edge. “I don’t think they deliver out here, so I’ll have to go in and get it. Are you alright with having pizza tomorrow? I need to patch up my skin first.”

And Tommy, mouth dry, said, “Okay.”

And the next day they had pizza, and it really was just that simple, wasn't it? Phil came back with a few boxes stacked up, which he set down on the table beside the cleaver gash, saying that he got the kinds the cashier said were most popular. Wilbur whined and complained about the slipperiness of human food, and ended up abstaining from pizza. Techno didn't care, eating it with something red and rotted smeared on top. And Tommy...

He picked up the slice of vegetarian on his plate, and ate it, and honestly he'd never liked pizza much. Had it too often at certain foster places, but... It was harder on his throat than soup had been, and oily enough to stain his fingers, and the flavours were numbed on his recovering tastebuds, but that was all overshadowed by the fact that he'd asked for it, and Phil had actually...

Phil, in an absolutely insane, batshit move, had gone and gotten what Tommy asked for. It didn't make sense. It didn't make any fucking sense, and in the end Tommy only had one slice, unable to stomach more, but... fuck.

He didn't know what this meant.

-

“Hey Wil,” Tommy said loudly, focused on the grass he was uprooting. “I don't feel like wearing red today. Can you get me a blue shirt?”

Wilbur frowned at him. Just frowned, with eyebrows scrunching together. “What makes it a blue day over a red day?”

“I dunno, just feels like it,” Tommy said, even though it didn't.

And then he watched as Wilbur said a few last complaints before getting to his feet and heading inside, and then bringing Tommy a pale blue collared shirt.

Huh.

-

“Hey Wil, can you get me that book from the top shelf? The fucking big and heavy one.”

-

“Hey Techno, can I eat one of the tomatoes? No, it won’t human poison me.”

-

“Hey Phil, can I sew blue squares today instead of yellow ones?”

-

Just. What the fuck. Tommy didn’t understand any of it.

His voice always shook, the words choking him, his hands fisted until the scabs bled, and yet it didn’t matter. Because nothing fucking happened. He stood there, toeing the line, smearing his blood over it, and yet with each step it felt like the line might not exist at all.

Then he made a different discovery.

-

“Hey,” Wilbur said lightly. “Ready to head out?”

And they were ready, with Wilbur’s guitar case slung over his shoulder, Tommy standing by the door, and plans for their walk already set in motion. But, emboldened by the discoveries he’d made, Tommy swallowed and said, “No. Don’t feel like it.”

“At all?”

“No.”

Wilbur frowned, opening his mouth to say something, but then deciding against it. He glanced out with nothing short of a bit of longing, but turned back to Tommy with a grin. “Well, what else do you want to do then?”

Huh.

Apparently Tommy also had the ability to say ‘no’.

What the fuck.

-

“Ah, Tommy, good timing,” Techno said, marching towards Tommy from the direction of the basement doors. In his hands was a large glass jar, filled with murky red, the smell already potent in the air. “I just realised I never showed you what a working heart looked like, and while this one isn’t technically that I thought-“

“No,” Tommy said.

Techno stopped. Stared at him. “No...?”

“No,” Tommy repeated with a shrug. “I’m not interested in seeing it.”

“Oh,” Techno said. “Are you, uh, sure?”

But Tommy was already moving away, back indoors. Behind him, Techno watched, but didn’t stop him. Tommy waited for it, but the glass jar never made a reappearance.

-

“Right, so what you want to do for this stitch is-” Phil began, but Tommy interrupted him out.

“No,” Tommy said, audibly in the quiet morning.

“No?” Phil echoed in confusion.

“I don’t feel like sewing today,” Tommy said, putting down his needle and felt.

Phil was quiet for a moment, before leaning back. “Well, alright. We can do these lessons another time then.”

“Okay,” Tommy said, and he got up and left, and Phil didn’t stop him.

-

“Do you want soup for supper?”

“No.”

"...Okay, I'll go get pizza."

-

"Kid, can you maybe stop dropping tomatoes on my floors?"

"No."

"...Please?"

-

"Hey Tommy! I finally got the snakes out of Snakes and Ladders, do you want to play--"

"No."

"Alright so maybe not all the snakes but you don't have to be mean about it."

-

"I'm going on a walk," Tommy announced to the room at large, careful to keep himself indifferent, even as his heart pounded faster in his chest. Instantly Wilbur was putting his book aside, getting to his feet with an easy grin. Phil looked up briefly, before going back to sewing.

"Guitar or no guitar?" Wilbur asked, already reaching for the attic ladder, but Tommy grimaced and dug his nails into his palms until the scabs bled.

"Neither. I don't want company."

That made Wilbur pause, and by pure coincidence, made Tommy's heartbeat speed up more. A few expressions flittered over the monster's face, and Tommy's leg ached, but he stayed where he was until Wilbur's mouth pulled taut. "Are you sure?" he pressed. "Where are you going?"

"Dunno yet," Tommy said, with forced casualness. "I'll figure it out."

Wilbur blinked, long and swirling, and Tommy found himself looking away, hit with a sense of vertigo. His fingers dug a little more into the soft flesh of his hand, picking at the scabs, as

he waited for... something. For Wilbur to tell him he couldn't. For the monster to finally show itself. For the attic door to close and lock with him trapped inside.

For some sort of barrier, resistance, a line Tommy could finally cross.

He'd never been alone since setting foot in this lair, aside from the moments when he was too weak to move. But now he wasn't. Now he had his crutches and his shoes and half-decent lungs, and maybe he still couldn't get far but he could get somewhere, and maybe that would be too much.

They might think he was going to run, and maybe he would, and he wanted to know if they would stop him, even if the answer was terrifying.

He just needed to know.

But all Wilbur said was "Alright." Well, he said that, and then, "I'll draw you a map of trails to take- Wait shit no I can't. Uh, let me help you figure out where to go, and I can come check up on you, if you want. Make sure you're okay. I could even--"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"When I say alone, I mean *alone* alone," Tommy said, looking anywhere but at Wilbur. "You're smothering. Fuck off."

"I- Okay," Wilbur mumbled. "But maybe Phil can--"

"Nope. No sending Phil after me," Tommy paused, then added, "Or Techno. I just- A man needs his time alone, to do manly things, you know?"

"I don't know," Wilbur said, sounding stressed. "But... alright. I'll be here. Waiting for you to get home. Because I care about you."

His eyes were wide, pupils blown and shining, and Tommy grimaced and purposefully turned away. "Yeah I... I care about you too. I'll be back." Maybe.

"Okay," Wilbur said again. "I'll be here. Waiting."

Tommy left him there, the door closing between them. Then he was alone.

He took two steps before hesitating, waiting for the door to open after him, for hands, imaginary or real, to drag him back in. For the darkness and the suffocation and the locked doors and Dream-

But Wilbur was not Dream.

It was quiet. Just Tommy and the shift of wind and the late afternoon birdsong. He braced himself and moved off the porch as he followed the stone walkway to the wall of the garden. He set a hand on the gate, waited, glancing behind him once.



Wilbur's entire face was pressed against the glass of the front window. The monster waved.

Tommy, with something uncertain, waved back.

Then he turned, unlatched the gate, and walked through.

Nobody came after him, and he chose a path he hadn't been on before. He walked until the trees enveloped him, and the house was hidden, and his heartbeat still felt loud in his ears. There were no other footsteps, no breathing, no goosebumps to prickle at his flesh nor any sense that he wasn't alone. No monsters were here, or at least if they were, they'd learned to be stealthy about it.

Absently, he wondered if Wilbur would come after him. If- If Wilbur would listen. And Tommy hated that, and he hated himself, because he knew he'd always give people second chances and he'd let them ignore him over and over and let himself get hurt and... What if just this once, everything was okay?

What if Wilbur listened and Tommy was left alone?

He didn't know what to do about that.

Maybe... Maybe Tommy would run away. He hadn't considered it before, but now... He had all the advantages he was going to get. He could walk, and keep walking, and leave the cottage far behind. Sure he didn't know where the town was but the option was there and-

The thought made his stomach clench, and he closed his eyes and breathed through the vague nausea. Then he opened them again and quickly skirted the animal bone he almost tripped on.

Alright, so maybe Tommy's thoughts on all of this were a bit fucked up. Maybe he didn't know what he wanted. Maybe he didn't know if he was going to keep walking or turn back to that house.

Wasn't sure if anything waited for him there.

Maybe he'd just keep walking out of spite. The desperate, ugly truth of it being that he had literally nowhere else to go besides the monsters. He wasn't imprisoned, but it was a close enough feeling to leave him bitter.

He could stop walking, and sit down, and let the forest consume his corpse.

The thought had his lungs seizing, and Tommy braced himself at the coughing fit. It was a harsher one, the worst he'd had in days, leaving the taste of blood thick in his mouth. He spat to the side, wincing at the globe of petals. Then he crushed them under one shoe, ground them into the dirt, and kept going.

Unfortunately his body wasn't keeping up with the memo. It was hard to get his breath back, and he was starting to shake, tremors down his arms and up his legs as an ice-deep pain started.

Within his shoes, a blister popped.

“I think I might be fucking stupid,” Tommy said aloud, to absolutely no one, because his thoughts were messy and he was an idiot and he was entirely alone.

Yeah, let’s just keep walking and leave behind the monsters and then suffocate on flowers, the exact death he didn’t want. Idiot. Stupid fucking- Whatever.

So Tommy was going to go back, if only because the hanahaki was a bitch and he refused to let it win. He just... wouldn’t go back yet. He was fucking tired and his muscles were aching and it was difficult to keep his bad leg propped up above the ground, but he still wanted to go farther. Just a bit farther. He hadn’t been alone like this in a long time.

His sweater vest and the long sleeves of his shirt helped keep him warm, but he noticed the air was getting colder as the sun reached the end of the afternoon. He was going to have to add a jacket to the growing list of things he might ask for.

It would be nice to be warm. Sometimes.

His steps started dragging, his leg sharply aching. At some point further, he simply tripped, and stumbled, and awkwardly half fell to the forest floor.

Right.

Fuck.

Everything was fucking hurting, and he was tired.

Tommy propped himself up, wincing at the sharp debris that scratched his palms from catching himself, and from the bruise in his ribs where his crutch had jabbed him on the way down. Both crutches lay scattered around him while he drew up his legs and massaged the right one, grimacing at the bone-deep ache that the chill was not helping.

Fuck, he was cold. And tired. And sore. And his arms were shaking just holding himself up.

He sat back against a tree instead, easing himself into a comfortable position and breathing deeply. Then he ran his hands over his face.

“I’m so fucking stupid,” he repeated, because he, a certified idiot, had to somehow get back to the cottage. He decided he was going to return, which was great, awesome in fact. But now he had to actually do that, and he wasn’t even sure if he could stand up again.

Just. He could rest, wait until he caught his second wind.

Which would be easier if his lungs didn’t seize, choking his throat as petals bloomed from his lips. He coughed harshly, raw and sore, and wiped blood onto his sleeve.

Immediately another fit started, and he braced himself, breathing through the end of it rhythmically to sooth his lungs again. His head ended up resting against the tree behind him, eyes squeezed shut as he counted in his head the timing of each inhale and exhale, carefully clearing his mind of any thoughts at all.

Then he just. Sat there.

For a long while.

Cold and stiff and taking small breaths to stave off the fits that found him anyway. The sharp pain in his leg wasn't getting any better, and he doubted he could move far before he'd need to rest again so he just...

...kept sitting there.

Shivering, as he eyed the dimness of the forest around him, the sun somewhere close to sinking. A part of him wanted to panic at the growing shadows, but the other part just felt resigned.

It was quiet too. A horrible, shrivelled quiet, like there was nothing else to exist. Like Tommy was alone so completely and utterly.

Wait. No. That wasn't quite right. It was quiet like something was watching. Like there were eyes, roving, prying, trying to get under his skin. His breath hitched as he sat forward and strained to hear a single goddamn thing.

The forest was utterly, completely silent.

Until-

*Crack!*

Like lightning, like brittle wood snapping in a fire.

It made Tommy jolt, twisting to scan the trees, thoughts consumed by a weirdly distant panic and the indignation that he was about to die to a fucking bear or something of all things-

*Crack-!*

A second snap, like an arm twisting and breaking.

*Crack-!*

*Crack crack-!*

A third, a fourth, until the woods were crackling around him, twigs and sticks snapping all at once in a claustrophobic cacophony. Until shapes, numerous and dark, burst out of the underbrush-!

Deer, Tommy thought stupidly, as he instinctively threw up his arms to cover his head and twisted over himself to make himself smaller.

They were lithe, quick things, sharp hooves piercing the dirt as they passed in a flurry, kicking up nettle and leaves and leaving the air echoing with their rapid passage. Tommy

caught a glimpse of one or two, of bloody forms and matted fur and sloughing pelts and white bone showing through-

Then his skin prickled, his breath caught, and he jerked back as the last deer bolted past and he realised he was far from alone.

There was something shifting through the underbrush, moving sinuously through the trees, stalking the prey that fled before it.

Tommy almost wanted to think it was a bear again, but he wasn't that stupid.

Slowly, two bright eyes fixated on him, followed by a hulking, shadowed mass that stalked forward with wet, dragging steps. The smell of rot cloyed the air, overwhelming, as flesh dripped off the beast and-

"Tommy," it said. He- He said.

Tommy blinked. "Techno."

"Kid."

"Bitch."

"Lovely seeing you too," Techno said dryly. Then he glanced around and shifted awkwardly. "Uh. Nice evening out."

"Yeah, I-" Tommy rubbed his eyes, wincing at the grit caught in them and the ache in his fingers. Blurrily, he looked at the fading light between the tree branches, then he was forced to acknowledge the beast in the room. "Wait, what- What the fuck? Why are you here? Did Wilbur send you? I told him not to-"

"Yeah, you did," Techno agreed, cutting him off. "But he didn't send me. I was out walking the dogs when I heard the sounds of a kid being weird in the forest."

Tommy blinked. Squinted. "Those were not fucking dogs."

"Dog-adjacent, whatever."

"They were clearly deer you pretentious prick-"

"Agree to disagree."

"Agree to my finger in your face," Tommy retorted, flipping him off as he coughed into an elbow and smeared blood across his sleeve. "Why are you really here?"

Techno made a very heavy, extended sound as he dragged a meaty hand down his face. "I wanted to... check on you."

"You just said-"

“Wilbur didn’t ask me to,” Techno corrected. “Well, he did, but I ignored him. I decided to come on my own, which you never said you had a problem with unless it was Wilbur sending me, so. Loophole.”

“Oh my god.”

“Get good with your wording next time.”

“Shut the fuck up. Why do you even care?”

There was a pause, long and awkward, enough that Tommy glanced up at Techno again, who shifted and stared off somewhere to the left. “You uh. You’re very weak and small, and letting you be in the forest alone for an extended period of time seemed counterintuitive to keeping you alive. Also it’s uh. It’s been hours. And Wilbur won’t leave me alone. I was harassed into doing this, but not really. It was my decision.”

Tommy took a moment to try to unravel all of that. “I’m fine.”

“Okay,” Techno agreed easily. “Do you uh, want to come back home now?”

Tommy grimaced, and suddenly pretended very hard that his hands weren’t shaking and his leg wasn’t spiking with pain that grew sharper with the night chill. “No. I’m just. Sitting here for a bit.”

“Oh. Can I come sit with you?”

Tommy’s immediate response would be to tell him to fuck off, but unlike Wilbur, Techno might actually do just that, and as much as Tommy hated it he’d probably need help getting back. Or anywhere. Or just- He didn’t want help, was the thing.

Techno stepped forward, shrunken catching on the thick fur of his cloak, heavy and dragging. Then he sort of... sat down? On the dirt beside Tommy, criss-cross applesauce, hands fidgeting with matted layers of fabric.

“So are we having floor time?” Techno began after a full minute of silence had passed.

Tommy stared at him. “Floor time?”

“Just. Sitting on the floor. Having floor time,” Techno elaborated.

Tommy didn’t respond, looking away and feeling his finger tighten against his legs until they throbbed sharply. His palms were sore and bloody, scabs rubbed open from his crutches, and he felt the need to pick and scratch at the wounds again. His feet might be bleeding too. He didn’t dare take off his shoes to check.

But Techno didn’t say anything after that. He just sat there beside Tommy, staring at nothing, chest rising and falling with slow breaths that Tommy absently tried to match. He watched the way the claws idly tapped, but Techno didn’t say anything, and suddenly it was Tommy who felt words bubbling up in his throat. Who felt this ugly thing in his chest expand with the need for something to *happen*.

“I was running away,” he said, terrifyingly, because if nothing else than this would get a reaction. This would get a bruising grip on his arm and dragging and yelling and- and- and everything expected. “I wasn’t going to go back. This is just as far as I got.”

It was only the half truth but that didn’t matter. All that mattered was Tommy wanted to push until something broke, then that ugly mess inside him might finally go away.

He waited, horribly, for Techno to do something.

What the beast did was speak, careful and slow. “Back to town?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you... want help?”

Tommy froze, eyes wide, staring at the ground. His ears were ringing. “You’d... help me?”

“I mean, if you don’t want to be with us we can’t exactly keep you here,” Techno said, gesturing broadly at nothing, fidgeting. “And I’d rather you didn’t die stupidly in a forest trying to get back, so I might as well help you.”

“You’d let me go?” Tommy asked, feeling a thousand miles away all of a sudden, like his head was filled with static.

“I- Yeah, I mean, I’d- I’d prefer it. If uh, you stayed, for Wilbur’s sake. He’s going to be insufferable without you. But I’m not- I’m not going to keep you here. Not anymore. Not if you don’t want to be.”

“Wilbur would come after me-“

“He’d leave you alone,” Techno corrected, “Or I’d make him. If you want out, then I’ll get you out, and that will be the end of it.”

And it still didn’t make sense. “Why?”

“Because you’re supposed to be alive?” Techno answered, with a hint of confusion. “And being around humans will... will definitely be better for you. Better socialisation, better access to nutrients, better enrichment, and.... Why are you looking at me like that?”

What Tommy wanted to say was because he didn’t fucking understand him.

What he ended up saying was, “Why do you care?”

Techno made a dismissive noise, and replied automatically. “I don’t.”

But the voice said: *I care about you. I don’t want you to go. I don’t know how to let you go.*

Tommy paused, for a very long moment. “I think you care about me.”

Techno looked like he was going to disagree again. “I... Alright, fine. I care to a minimal extent, kid. I don’t have a choice in this. Wilbur would be insufferable if I didn’t.”

*I care so much I don’t know what to do.*

Oh.

Oh.

Tommy did not understand this at all.

He didn’t understand why his chest locked up for a moment, seizing with something unfamiliar, or why his hand drifted over, and his fingers snagged in Techno’s sleeve.

But Techno looked down at him, nothing behind the sockets of the skull. Nothing that Tommy found he could fear. “...Tommy?”

“Yeah I’d,” Tommy had to swallow, something choking him. “Yeah I’d like some help.”

And that was how Techno helped him up, and then hunched over and offered an arm as a ledge, Tommy having to grip the matted furs in order to haul himself up. He ended up on Techno’s shoulders, and as the monster stood up he got a wave of vertigo. “Woah, you’re tall.”

Techno huffed, and gathered up the crutches to carry, and suddenly Tommy was desperately gripping the layered fabrics as the world shifted and Techno started moving.

It was getting darker, the sun truly setting, but Techno had no issue navigating the forest. He weaved between shadowed trunks, in lumbering, dragging steps, and one of his massive clawed hands rested over Tommy’s leg, keeping him in place.

The furs were warm, but Tommy was still shivering, and he hunched over in an effort to sap Techno’s body heat. It meant he was practically draped over the skull, arms folded on the broad surface, idly picking at the bits of sinew stuck to it. At least the blood and flesh were dry and stiff, or else this would be a lot more gross.

He almost fell asleep like that, curled up and listening to steady, slow breaths and the rhythmic *fsssh thumps* of heavy steps. He didn’t know why his brain had spontaneously decided this was fine and that Techno- Techno was okay.

Then, he caught flickers of light through the trees, and sat up slightly, only to jerk up in alarm when he realised it wasn’t the few lights of the cottage, but many of them, spread out in a line accompanied by the dark shapes of houses and-

Techno had taken him to the town.

Tommy, in a moment of clarity, realized his fuck up in not specifying a location but- But this whole time he’d been thinking of his bed in the attic. Of the flicker of lantern light and the stars in the dark sky outside and Wilbur’s weird snores from metres away. Of listening to monsters roaming around downstairs, and smelling salty soup broth and-

Tommy might have made a mistake.

“Do you want me to put you back in the house where we found you?” Techno asked idly, slowing down as they approached the barrier of artificial light. “Or is there somewhere else?”

And Tommy... Tommy should say yes. He should name a house with people. Like Bad’s or Sapnap’s or- or even Tubbo’s. A place with people and- and- and he wasn’t sure what else.

He looked at the town, at the buildings and the lights in the windows, and felt his heart rate pick up. All he could think about was that shell of a house with an unlocked back door and a boarded up window, and a bedroom where he sat for days and no one came. Of being curled up, in the dark, listening for footsteps as his breath caught and fear thrummed through his veins.

There was nothing here for him, Tommy realised. Or at least, nothing that would ever be as good as what he had now.

And leaving Wilbur, who cared about him, and Techno, who tried to help, and even Phil who fucking sucked was- was-

Yeah, Tommy might have fucked up here, but he also didn’t know how to say that. He didn’t know how to say he’d rather live with monsters than people, because at least then he knew he wouldn’t be hurt.

He didn’t know how, but he tried.

“I uh, I meant I wanted help getting back to the lair,” he said stupidly.

Techno stopped then. His hand tightened around Tommy’s leg. “What?”

“Yeah I uh, I thought you were taking me back to your weird stupid lair. I forgot about the town thing. Sorry.”

“You don’t want to go back to the humans? Are you sure?” Techno pressed, tilting the skull back to look at Tommy, and Tommy found himself staring into the sockets, seeing the glistening sheen of eyes peering back at him.

Tommy had to look away. “Fuck off, I don’t know what I want. But your place is as good as any so I might as well crash there. And Wilbur will be fucking stupid without me.”

“That’s uh, good. That you’re staying with us,” Techno said awkwardly. And then worst of all, he reached up and set a hand over Tommy’s head, practically engulfing his entire skull. It took him a moment to realise he was getting his hair gingerly ruffled.

Yeah Tommy had no fucking idea how to react to that. “What the fuck.”

“I’m bad at human gestures of affection.”

“Yeah no shit. What the fuck.”



“Let’s stop talking about this. And you can just call it a house, you don’t have to say lair.”

“But you guys call it a lair.”

“Yeah, but we’re less weird about it.”

“That’s a fucking lie, Mr Dog-Adjacent.”

“They have four legs and run a lot, that’s basically a dog.”

“Deer are herbivores, dipshit.”

“...I mean, those ones weren’t.”

“Techno, shut the fuck up.”

—

Tommy glanced up when he heard a knock against soft wood. His hair was still wet from the bath he took when he got back, both to wash off the blood and to warm up. Techno hadn’t said anything about Tommy running away. Hadn’t mentioned a word to the other monsters. Just deposited Tommy down and made his excuses and left.

Now, Tommy looked up to find Wilbur at the attic trapdoor, peeking his head in. Earlier he’d checked Tommy over, untrusting of Techno, and it’d taken forever for Tommy to get him to fuck off again.

“Yeah?”

“Can I come up?” Wilbur asked, and he’d never asked that before, and...

He expected Tommy to say no, didn’t he? Tommy was tempted to, because saying no was unfamiliar and he wanted to remember the way it felt, but even he could admit that he’d been alone too much today.

“Yeah.”

Wilbur brought the first aid kit up with him, and Tommy sat silently as Wilbur took his hands and cleaned and wrapped them again. White bandages to hide the mess he’d made of them.

“Do you want me to sleep elsewhere tonight?” Wilbur asked, focused on packing the supplies back into the kit, but Tommy recognized the uncertainty in his voice. “I don’t um, want to smother.”

Oh. Shit, right. “It’s fine,” Tommy mumbled. “You’re not smothering, I don’t- I don’t know why I said that to you. I thought I wanted to be alone but I don’t know.”

Wilbur hesitated, then reached up and placed a hand on Tommy’s head. Tommy tensed under the ensuing hair ruffle. Seriously, what was up with that? “Well, maybe you don’t have to know. Maybe you can figure it out later. I’m just glad you’re back.”

Tommy grimaced and reached up and patted Wilbur's head so they both looked stupid, fingers catching on curls of hair. "Yeah, I'm glad I'm back too."

*I don't know how to say I care about you.*

## Chapter End Notes

i'm sorry you had to find out this way but in this fic tommy dresses like an old man. if he doesn't embody a haunted victorian child then what's the point

Tommy: "dog-adjacent"

Tommy: he's so pretentious

Tommy: it's a fucked up deer

Also there is a [podfic](#)!!! please show your love and appreciation

FANART:

-[spooky spooky vibes](#) (tw blood/flower horror)

-[its the boy!](#) (tw blood)

-[allium!tommy let's gooooo](#) (tw flower/body horror)

-[cover material right here](#)

# Brittle Things

## Chapter Summary

Tommy is given a gift (and it's not a dead body)

## Chapter Notes

This chapter has been finished in my drafts for over a year. At this point I'm exorcising a haunting. It's also the last completed chapter I have so uh. Here's to seeing if I'll update again next year.

### Warnings

Dehumanising use of it/its pronouns

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up into darkness. Kaleidoscopic, coalescing swirls of pitch-black that fell back and back and back into the abyss. The smell of stale decay permeating the air around him, like suffocating in the cold lightless bottom of a mire.

Then the darkness blinked away.

And it was just Wilbur.

Wilbur, who had eyelids that spiralled inwards and was blinking at Tommy innocently, staring with shining pupils.

Tommy blinked back very, very slowly. "Did we ever add a rule about not staring at me when I sleep?"

"You always sleep," Wilbur protested, sliding down onto the floor. "You're always human sleeping all the time."

Tommy grimaced, working up the energy to sit up slowly and rub the crust out of his eyes. "I'm always human sick all the time," he countered, and Wilbur let out a displeased hum.

He was still staring at Tommy.

“Do you need something?” Tommy ventured, only for Wilbur to immediately interrupt him.

“Are you ready to go downstairs yet?”

Tommy paused. Reevaluated. “...What’s downstairs?”

Wilbur froze. “Nothing. Nothing’s downstairs. Just. Want to go down there. For reasons.”

“Suspicious reasons?”

“Normal reasons. Normal human reasons.”

Tommy made the executive decision that this was stupid and wasn’t worth his valuable and limited time. He made his point by leisurely working out the stiffness of sleep, rolling his neck until it gave a satisfying pop. It was even more satisfying to see the face Wilbur made at the noise, nose scrunched up in distaste. “What?”

“Are you sure you’re not breaking your human bones?” Wilbur said, giving a visible shudder as Tommy rolled his wrists to crack them. “I know you’re delicate, and it sounds. Bad.”

“What sounds bad? This?” Tommy said, at the same time he loudly popped his ankles.

Wilbur contorted to face away, expression threatening to implode on itself. “That can’t be natural. Please stop breaking yourself.”

“No,” Tommy said, and twisted his spine until it cracked as well, then searched for more stiff bones to pop as Wilbur hissed and moved to the other side of the room.

“Downstairs,” Wilbur urged, grimacing at the next joints that cracked. “Tommy!”

“Alright, downstairs,” Tommy agreed, and grabbed his crutches as he shuffled over, rolling his wrists again just to see if there was any sound left to make.

Wilbur dropped down first, not even bothering with the ladder, then reached up to take Tommy’s crutches and hold them while Tommy worked his way down the rungs. He was so focused on what he was doing, he didn’t realise something was off until his feet touched the ground. It was eerily silent, heavy breathing that wasn’t his own permeating it, sounding suspiciously like Techno’s.

Tommy turned, shoulders hunched and defensive and-

He blinked.

Took a moment to take in the room.

Phil and Techno stood near the table, staring at him, but that wasn’t what took his attention. Instead it was the red streamers hung throughout and tacked to the ceiling, as well as the occasional balloon. There was a glittery sign that said ‘congratulations’ strung over one of the windows. Someone had put out a black lace tablecloth that looked like it belonged in a funeral, and honestly, Tommy wouldn’t be surprised if that’s what they were celebrating.

More importantly, the centrepiece of it all was a squarish dishevelled box on the table, wrapped in old newspaper, with blood seeping out of a corner. A box that, just from a glance, was about the right size to fit a human head.

Okay.

Alright.

Tommy could accept whatever the fuck was going on here, he just needed a minute.

A minute the monsters didn't give him, as Phil clapped its hands together, Wilbur sucked in a breath, and Techno shifted in place.

"Congratulations!"

"Happy birthday!"

"Our condolences."

Tommy blinked again, very slowly, something uncertain in his stomach. "What?"

"Happy one week alive, kid," Techno said, gesturing to the room and then to the blood stained box that definitely did not contain a human head. "I told you we'd celebrate it. Phil bought you the gift, I wrapped it."

"And I decorated," Wilbur butted in. "Phil said you wouldn't appreciate human skin, but I still used the next best thing."

"Oh," Tommy said dumbly. "Okay."

"Why don't you open your gift, mate?" Phil offered.

Tommy hesitated, eyeing the package dubiously. "You didn't need to get me anything."

"It was Techno's idea," Phil explained. "Thought it might be a nice gesture."

Tommy wanted to hesitate some more, but then Wilbur's weight was leaning eagerly against him, so he shuffled forward and stared down at the box. There was now a dark red puddle gathered underneath it. Alright.

Tommy grimaced and pushed aside the rest of his reservations, figuring it was better to get this over with. He tore open the layers of newspaper, to the dented cardboard, and opened the flaps. Blinked. Oh.

It wasn't a human head.

Mind blank, Tommy reached in and carefully drew out a smaller, mint-condition box that had poorly photoshopped pictures of smiling kids and an excessive amount of pink on it. The bubble letters told him it was a friendship bracelet kit.

So they'd... given him a friendship bracelet kit. Not a piece of a corpse. Okay.

Okay.

Something unfamiliar and uncertain was curling in his stomach. He didn't know what to feel as he stared at the kit in his hands, running his fingers over the glossy exterior and staring at the glittering images. He tensed, thinking about the room around him, the balloons and signs and streamers. He didn't know what to feel. He didn't know-

Something stung, at the corner of his eye, and he was quick to shove the swelling feeling down and casually rub his face against his shoulder as he turned to Phil and presented the box. "You got me this?"

"Ah, I hope you like it," Phil said, metal creaking as its fingers flexed in an almost nervous gesture. "I'll admit I don't know what interests humans your age, but I asked the cashier and they suggested this."

"...And how old did you say I was?"

"Hmm, about twelve?"

Tommy blinked. "I'm sixteen."

"Oh! That's almost exactly what I guessed," Phil said, pleased. "Do you like it then?"

Tommy didn't know how to respond. He stared at the box in his hands. "Yeah," he said, and had to clear his throat when his voice cracked. "Yeah, uh, I like it a lot."

"The cashier also mentioned a cake, if we were celebrating something," Phil continued, "I'll get it from the fridge."

That left Tommy standing there, staring at the box in his hands. His fingers were shaking, and he tightened his grip to make it stop but that just seemed to make it worse. Resolutely, he sat down and before he could hesitate, ripped the box open and spilled its insides over the table: cheap plastic string, packets of beads, and an instruction manual he knew he was never going to read. Wilbur was instantly at his side, poking at the packets with a long claw. Techno was behind him, breathing into his hair as the beast leaned over to look.

"Okay everyone sit down," Tommy ordered, batting away Wilbur's hands. "We're going to friendship bracelet this bitch."

Wilbur and Techno ended up sliding onto the benches at the table, Wilbur beside Tommy and Techno across, and Tommy worked at opening packets and sorting beads into little piles, before divvying up the plastic strings. Then Phil joined them, setting down a grocery store cake as well as utensils and plates. Tommy got a look at the cake before it was cut - It had a drawing of a fish and the words "Good Job" iced into it.

"What," Tommy said, as a piece with the fish's eye staring back was handed to him.

"Cake," Phil said.

“...Yeah,” Tommy agreed.

He tentatively took a bite, wincing at the cloying sweetness. He was nauseous today, he realised. His stomach churned at the thought of eating more, or eating anything, and he subtly shifted his plate to the side. It was easier to focus on how despite dainty bites, Techno kept getting icing on his boar skull. Wilbur poked at his piece, sampled it, then made a face and passed it over to Techno. Phil didn't eat at all, and started reading through the bracelet instruction manual like a prick. God, Tommy hated this monster.

So of course, while Tommy was content to fuck around and find out, Phil ended up being the one to instruct them how to weave the plastic cords and beads together into something presentable.

The first bracelet Tommy made wasn't too terrible. The beads were annoying as fuck to string, especially as his hands shook, but watching Wilbur try and fail to skewer beads with the claws he's bragged so much about made the experience worth it.

“Hand,” Tommy said, when he was done, and Wilbur unquestioningly held out his arm.

Carefully, despite his fumbling, trembling fingers, Tommy was able to tie a knot and secure the bracelet to Wilbur's wrist. Wilbur blinked, holding it up and examining it. Among a random assortment of beads, including a little dinosaur and a dolphin, Tommy had added Wilbur's name, in the form of "wimble".

Wilbur stared for a long moment at that, then turned to Tommy. “Hand.”

Tommy's first instinct was to hesitate, but then he gathered his resolve and held out his hand. He almost flinched as Wilbur's fingers brushed his skin, expertly tying a knot and leaving Tommy to inspect the bracelet. It had a heart and a smiley face on it. Between those it had Tommy's name in the form of "timly".

Tommy stared for a long moment at that. “I hate you.”

“Come on, fucking Wimble?” Wilbur protested, throwing up his hands.

“Excuse you, at least I tried harder than Timly! Who the hell names their boy Timly?”

“Who names a monster Wimble?”

“Great men do,” Tommy protested. “Big men, like me. You should be thankful!”

“Oh really well-“

“Wilbur,” Techno interrupted. “Give me your hand.”

Wilbur scowled, but did so, watching Techno tie a quick knot before taking back his arm and squinting at it. Wilbur's bracelet had a turtle and a duck on it. “This literally just says "noodle".”

“Yeah,” Techno agreed serenely. “Noodle.”

“Noodle,” Tommy echoed.

“I’m running away,” Wilbur declared. “I’m packing up all my things and Tommy and I’m leaving and you were the ones that drove me to this.”

“Here, Wilbur,” Philza spoke up from across the table, from where it’d been weirdly quiet. Wilbur tensed up, accepting the bracelet when Phil dropped it into his hand. Tommy leaned over to get a look.

It was. Holy shit it was an actual well made bracelet, the plastic strings woven in a complicated pattern, with neatly selected beads interspersed, themed with an umbrella and raindrops. It even had Wilbur’s name, spelled correctly and everything.

“Although now I’m thinking I misunderstood the assignment,” Phil continued with a laugh, and to Tommy’s surprise, handed him and Techno a bracelet as well, having apparently completed all of them in the time it took Tommy to struggle through one.

Techno’s bracelet was themed with gemstone beads and, without looking at his own, Tommy braced himself. He expected it, the flowers interlaced and mocking. Yet, when he uncurled his fingers and looked at the jewellery in his palm, he found that the bracelet had an assortment of farm animals instead. A cow, right next to his name. His name that-

He blinked. “The M’s in Tommy are upside down.”

“They’re what?” Phil asked, head immediately swivelling over. “Ah, give it here, I’ll fix it, I’m sorry about-“

“No,” Tommy said, never getting used to how that word sounded in his mouth, how it made him tense in preparation for retribution, even when there was none to be found. “No take backs. I’m keeping this.”

“Tommy, please, that’s going to bother me so much,” Phil protested weakly, sliding down onto the table pathetically.

“I know.”

Tommy ignored the complaints that followed, resolutely slipping the bracelet onto his wrist and finding it was just the right size to fit over his hand. Then he got to work on his next bracelets, determined not to fall behind, even as his fingers shook and he kept dropping beads onto the floor.

Somehow though, as the afternoon progressed, he was able to hand them over. He gave Techno one with a dog on it, and the word ‘tegno’, then gave Phil one with smiley faces that read ‘phim’ with various beads and letters upside down. Techno, in turn, gave Tommy a bracelet suspiciously stained with red, with a dog and a heart on it, that read ‘child’.

Each bracelet was heavy on his wrist, and jangled when he moved, yet Tommy found he didn’t mind. He sat there for a moment, just twisting his arms, turning them over and over again and running his fingers over the beads.



Suddenly a massive, heavy hand was thumping lightly down on top of his head, and Tommy for once didn't even flinch out of sheer befuddlement. No, it couldn't be- It was. Techno was giving him an awkward, uneven hair ruffle, torturously careful.

"Why," Tommy demanded.

"I don't know," Techno responded. "I thought humans did this to each other but your face is telling me otherwise."

"Your face looks ugly," Tommy counterspelled automatically.

Techno snorted and pulled his hand away, leaving Tommy's hair fluffed up and staticy.

"That's the spirit. Can't wait to see you alive next week."

"Next week?"

"That's what we're doing, isn't it?" Techno asked. "Taking it one week at a time?"

Tommy opened his mouth, but didn't know what to say. "Wha- So, what, I just get a party every week forever?"

"Or until you're ready to take it two weeks at a time," Techno said. "Have a happy being alive."

And then he left, like an absolute bitch, as if all of this didn't mean anything. Tommy stared at him, chest tight with something he didn't know, and tried to picture himself alive a week from now... two weeks from now. It- It wasn't as hard as it used to be. He didn't know what to think about that.

His fingers slipped over the beads on his wrist.

Techno had gone outside to work on crafting the new kitchen table, and as Tommy watched him through the windows, Wilbur went out to pester and make nonsensical gestures and argue about the correct shape a table should be.

That, unfortunately, left Tommy at the old, gouged table and Phil in the kitchen. Alone in the same room.

Worse, Tommy almost sorta felt the need to say something.

But then Phil said something first. "I want to apologise."

Tommy blinked. Blinked again. This is not where he thought this morning would be going. He found himself focusing on rotating the cow bead around and around on his bracelet. He took a moment longer to answer.

"For what?"

"For what I said to you," Phil explained carefully. It was half turned away, over the sink, as if it could be enveloped in the illusion of doing dishes. Like eye contact was an issue for a thing

with eyes clamped in. “In the garden. And for how I treated you.”

“Oh,” Tommy said. “Okay.”

For a moment, there was the sound of Phil's fingers creaking, before: “I’m sorry.”

Then it waited.

Tommy stared at it. “Okay?”

Phil hesitated. “So you... accept the apology?”

“If that’s what you want to hear, then sure.”

“No, I-” Phil cut itself off. “I mean it. I thought- well, I thought a lot of things, but I thought that you weren’t- and that you didn’t- But I was wrong. I mean, clearly I was wrong, since you’re standing here now, but I didn’t see what Wilbur saw, and I didn’t give you a chance, and that was my mistake.”

Tommy blinked very fucking slowly. Suddenly he was envious of Wilbur, outside trying to point out flaws in the new table and almost getting his arm cleaved off instead. “Okay.”

“You were- You were trying, and I didn’t see that, and I just dismissed it. I should’ve known you could get better. I’m sorry.”

“Okay.”

“Do you think that maybe you could say something besides ‘okay’?” Phil asked, strained, and Tommy hunched over so he could rest his head on his arms on the table, nails digging into the deep gash in the wood.

“What do you want me to say, Phil?”

“Just- Do you accept the apology? But- But don’t feel obligated to, I just. I want to know.”

Tommy had been forced to give a lot of apologies in his life. He’d also been on the receiving end of those same shitty apologies, and each and every time he’d had to smile and say it was okay, because that’s what he was supposed to do. Now, as far as shitty apologies went, Phil’s wasn’t bad. Fuck, it might even been genuine. But at the end of the day it didn’t matter, although a part of him wanted to say no, just to see what would happen.

“Phil,” he said instead. “And I mean this from the bottom of my heart, I honestly don’t give a shit about any of that.”

“But I-”

“Phil,” Tommy repeated. “I don’t care.”

He watched as the monster considered him, as the veil shifted, but remained in place. Heard the gentle squeak of rusted metal, as Phil’s hands flexed in and out.

“Okay,” Phil said.

It didn’t say anything more.

And that should have been the end of it.

Tommy should have sat there with his head buried in his arms, knowing nothing would come of any of this. He should have entertained the flowers in his lungs, succumbed to a fit, lavished in it. Instead he swallowed down the bile and stared at the empty friendship bracelet box and the newspaper wrapped lump it had been. He stared up at the balloons and streamers, a mimicry of gore. His fingers wouldn’t stop turning the beads on his bracelet.

He snuck a glance at Phil, who was finding the absolute perfect way to wrap up the leftover cake. Probably a breakdown away from getting out a leveller.

For some reason he wanted this to end differently. For some reason his brain was a fucking mess of contradictions. For some reason he couldn’t stop thinking about the gift.

“You said I was your kid,” he said, careful. “That’s what you told the cashier.”

Phil turned to him, but Tommy was resolutely studying the decorations above his head. “Yes? I said I adopted you, which is the correct term, I believe, for taking in a human child.”

“I’m not your kid.”

Phil’s veil tilted to the side. “That’s true, but I wasn’t going to tell the employee helping me that I was shopping for the human child my coworker abducted.”

Tommy paused, mouthed the word coworker to himself, then took to turning the cow bead over and over again on the string. “Still not your kid. I’m only here because of Wilbur.”

“That’s understandable,” Phil agreed.

Tommy tensed more, drawing his shoulders up to his ears and hunching down, focusing on the bracelet. “And- And I don’t forgive you. I don’t accept the apology you gave me.” There, he said it. A line, drawn in the sand, with nothing more solid to it. Easy to wipe away.

“Oh,” Phil said, after a long moment. “Alright.”

And that was it.

That was all there ever was.

Why was Tommy used to expecting more?

“But I do appreciate it,” he mumbled, the words thick in his mouth. “That you apologised. Because you were very shitty, but honestly not that shitty on the spectrum of things I’ve had to deal with.”

“Okay, thank you for telling me,” Phil said, with annoying sincerity. “I’m still going to do my best to make it up to you, when I can. You deserve that.”

Tommy’s fingers stilled, breath catching in his throat. He was resolutely staring at the gash in the table, and not at the thing staring back. “Okay.”

And that was all he could manage.

After a moment, Phil started moving again, coming over to clean up the scraps from the friendship bracelet kit, before he started supper. “Is there anything you want to eat?” he asked idly, joints clicking in their motion.

Tommy closed his eyes, ignoring his slice of cake that he’d pushed to the side hours ago. “Just stew is fine.”

They both existed, for a moment, in perfect silence with each other. Neither spoke and Tommy eventually rested his head in his folded arms, feeling the bracelet digging into his skin, and the way his eyes stung just slightly.

He still didn’t know what this all meant.

It probably meant nothing at all.

## Chapter End Notes

Phil: I mean it's a human child, how old could he be? twelve-

Cashier: yeah could be

Phil: -hundred?

Cashier: ...

Phil: ...

Phil: i meant twelve. just twelve.

Can you believe this fic got me a significant other? Happy anniversary babe, I can't believe you rizzed up an anonymous fanfic author until you fell in love with them. goddamn.

## End Notes

Tumblr [@space-anon-writes](#)

## Works inspired by this one

[\[Podfic\] I Asked For A Monster and You Gave Me a Fairytale](#) by [Papermoonjelly](#)

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